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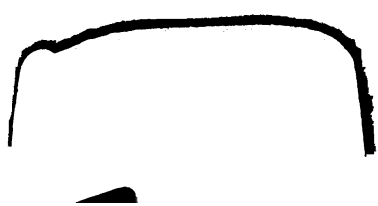

THE WEIRWOLF:

A Tragedy.

BY

WILLIAM FORSTER.

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THE WEIRWOLF.

A TRAGEDY.

FROM A STORY BY MRS. CROWE.

Persons.

MARQUIS DE MONTMORENCI.
CLEMENCE, *daughter of Marquis de Montmorenci.*
COUNT DE VARDOIS.
VICTOR, *son of Count de Vardois.*
JACQUES REYNARD.
MICHAEL THILOUZE.
FRANÇOISE, *daughter of Michael Thilouze.*
LUDOVIQUE THIERRY.
MANON, *daughter of Ludovique Thierry.*
PIERRE BLOUI.
FATHER SIMON.
SYLVANUS.
ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSIONERS.
PRIESTS.
MONKS.
LORDS, *and Nobles.*
JUDGES.
GENS D'ARMES, *Exempts, and Police.*
PEASANTS, *Male and Female.*

SCENE—*Neighbourhood of Chateau de Montmorenci.*

TIME—*Henry the Fourth.*

THE WEIRWOLF.

A Tragedy.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *Chamber in the Chateau de Montmorenci.* MONTMORENCI. DE VARDOIS *following him.*

DE VARD. I do not marvel, Marquis! at your wrath.
'Tis reasonable. 'Tis right. And not to feel
Some indignation due to his offence,
Would show you wanting in the self-respect,
Your dignity demands. Speak out then. Speak.
Give thought all freedom. Let your labouring soul
Deliver itself in unrestricted speech.
Trust me, I look for such. And you shall find
Though Victor is my son—my only son—
Nor wordy art, nor sophistry of mine,
Shall exculpate his conduct, or defend
From your just censure. No. To put this slight

Upon your daughter and your noble house—
By such a public and disgraceful show
Of his incontinence—with audacious front
To flout the reprobation of the world—
To make the honour of both our families,
A theme of vulgar gossip, and a mark
For sorry knaves to spit on and defile—
It is an error that——

MONT. An error! Humph!—

DE VARD. Yes. Yes. Be sure I reprobate the thing
As much as you do, Marquis!

MONT. By the Lord! then
'Tis in mine eyes worse—worse—than any crime—
Such base—such black—unmitigated wrong—
As never is pardoned—is unpardonable.
It shows a faithless—false—corrupted heart—
'Tis quite beyond endurance—that it is.

DE VARD. I own—I own—I beg you not to spare him—

MONT. Next to the doer of a deed of shame,
By Heaven I hold that man abominable,
Who strives to cheat us of our moral sense,
Diluting drivel with mock humanity.
I hate your palterer with plain naked facts,
Whose fine drawn glosses—silken palliatives,
Trim, cautious phrases cunningly devised—
Would smooth the bristling indignation down,

And set a screen of hollow sympathy
Between our wrongs and our resentment—
DE VARD. Nay—
But hear me my good Marquis!
MONT. Hear thee! Psha!
I'm sick of hearing. What I know's enough.
DE VARD. Come. Come. Be gentle. Give me all thy mind.
MONT. What! shall I draw de Vardois to the life?
DE VARD. I've bid thee set no limit to thy speech.
MONT. 'Tis not in words to satisfy my wrongs.
DE VARD. Be not unreasonable. I would confer—
I would take counsel with thee.
MONT. Counsel! Oh!
Best call in Victor to the conference then.
Being deepest in, he should advise us best.
DE VARD. This is too bitter, not to be unjust.
MONT. I know thee, Count de Vardois!
DE VARD. Well.
MONT. I know
How much this whole affair lies at thy heart,
If heart thou hast.
DE VARD. You wrong me, on my soul!
Since for no other purpose came I here,
Than to profess my grief and sympathy.

MONT. Profess them! Excellent.

DE VARD. Put me to the proof.

MONT. This is but mockery. How can right be done?

DE VARD. How can I offer more, than bind myself
To your own estimate of whatever's just?

MONT. Shall then the peerless Victor stand condemned?
Am I to pass the sentence—fix the penalty?

DE VARD. That Victor's guilty freely I confess—
What Victor's done I dare not justify.
Quite inexcusable has his conduct been—
Indecent—reckless—mad—disreputable.
I might have argued thus on his behalf—
To sin with women in this wanton kind
Is natural—nay 'tis common. 'Tis, we know,
By custom sanctioned to his rank and years,
And in itself, apart from circumstances,
Our lenient judgment claims, since once it was
The manner of us all. Young blood's so hot.
And passion's spring's flushed with licentiousness,
As is the genial opening of the year
Profuse in flowery sweets. Between ourselves
The bare seduction of a village girl
Were no such mighty matter, were it fenced
With that judicious care and secresy

Which his condition and your pride require.
But public—public as the homeless winds—
He's made his folly—blazoned it abroad
To noisome promulgation—spread it out
Like carrion in the sun, a common feast
For censure's venomous swarms to settle on
And blotch and fester—till by notoriety,
Which fools for ever covet, 'tis enflamed
And swelled to grave extremities of wrong.
Thus Victor's reputation blows and rots—
Thus to his fame an ugly taint adheres,
Like poison-blooms that fasten upon flowers—
Grow from their substance, and in growing spend
The precious life whereon their lives depend.
Therein's his guilt. This loose extravagance—
This braggadocio of indifference,—
This rampant recklessness shows him depraved,
And rank and gross in spirit. And worst of all,
With his own damning and deserved disgrace,
He links an innocent and a noble name.
I cannot, Montmorenci!—cannot say
How much I'm vexed—how mightily I'm annoyed.
There's no denying he's done you grievous wrong.
He owes you reparation and amends.
And therefore on his part I tender now
Whatever with his name and honour squares,
And with your own consists. Speak up, my friend!

What dost thou ask? What hast thou to propose?

MART. De Vardois seems in earnest by his talk.

DE VARD. Forbid it Heaven I should presume to jest
On such a subject!

MONT. To insult me then
Hast thou a mind?

DE VARD. Now is it necessary
I should deny this?

MONT. Nevertheless, I say—
I say, De Vardois! trifle not with me—
Mock me no more with questions of amends
And reparations. Nothing I've required,
And nothing I expect—at least from thee.
Good Lord! what reparation's possible?
How can a bleeding heart be made amends—
The heart of a young girl—innocent of the world,
And inexperienced in the ways of men—
That wells its life out in unnoticed wounds,
By nineteen summers made immedicable?
Can wounds like these—the wounds of slighted love—
Of shipwrecked faith and violated trust—
Be stanched, or plastered over, or assuaged
With woven words—their pretty pain appeased
With prim peccavis, put in properest form,

Or apt apologies, unctuously expressed,
And smoothly rounded off? Shall barren breath
Of fulsome protestations fill the void
Which disappointment hollows in the core
Of the unloved bosom? The profound despair—
The unfledged forlornness of a fresh young soul
Unused to misery—the life-blighting sense
Of infinite desolation that it feels
In its first sorrow of affection scorned—
Shall all this be repaired and set to rights
By curious calculation—its amount
Noted in figures—or its cruel cost
Solved satisfactorily by the rule of three?
My daughter's happiness—is that a thing
Which you can measure with a clothier's wand,
Or estimate in pounds avoirdupois?
These are not matters of arithmetic.
Would money or lands—would kingdoms compensate
The sacrifice of all her maiden state—
The sweet home life where once she simply stood,
In pride of unsurrendered womanhood?
De Vardois smiles. Yes. Men are apt to smile
At these soft sorrows, fancying they look down,
From heights sublime of superficial scorn,
And masculine right reason, and strong sense,
On what their purblind optics fail to seize
In right perspective—their irreverent senses

Clearly to apprehend—incapable
To reach beyond material aims—or sound
The depths of a diviner consciousness—
Or pierce that purest empyrean air
Where shines a thousand heavenly lights unseen
Of many human eyes—

DE VARD. What talk is this?
Are things so desperate? What, must all our plans
Then be abandoned? Nay—is Victor lost
Beyond all hope, and irreclaimable?
I trust not, Montmorenci!

MONT. Well. At least
'Tis somewhat ominous on the suitor's side
On the very eve of marriage with a maid
Who wants no heritage of noble parts
To parallel his own—it indicates
Or gross indifference, or degraded tastes,
To soil with foul and foreign kisses, lips
Plighted to pure affection, and made warm
And hallowed by my daughter's living breath.
This bodes no happy union, but instead
Foreshadows peril to the peace of both.
My girl was born for brighter auguries,
And to be heroine of a fairer fate,
Than in a Sultan's harem to sit first,
Or lead the animal herd of mistresses,
For some fine gentleman of modern views.

For neither Sultans, nor for Kings, I swear,
Shall she descend to this, and by the man
Who dares to marry her, she must needs be loved.
For 'tis, by Heaven, no more than she deserves.

DE VARD. There's nought in all the blessed categories,
Above the Lady Clemence high deserts.
My boy's been too much honoured in her choice.
If quiet grace—if modest excellence—
If beauty that on observation grows,
That wins by daily custom, and at last
Is in familiar fondness most endeared—
If all the gentler gifts and influences—
Those obscure virtues, rather felt than seen—
The homely charms—the household charities—
That like invisible angels float about,
Or breathe like violet odours from the depths
And holy shade, and privacy of home,
And are its chiefest joy—if these it be
A maiden's merit to possess, by Heaven!
Her equal treads not the fair soil of France.

MONT. Yet she, forsooth! must sit at home and sigh,
Must mourn, in worse than widowed solitude—
In solitude, more solitary made
By hopes encouraged only to be crushed—
By contumely contrived and aggravated
With unexpectedness, and undeserved

Indifference, and unmerited neglect—
Her scorned affections waiting to be wooed.
Deserted, yet affianced—less betrothed
Than offered for refusal—in the bloom
Of girlish freshness coarsely cast away,
Like fruit that from a glutton's sated lips
Untasted falls—in courtship's sunless dawn
Made premature partaker of a fate
Which wives, who've ripened through the nuptial noon
Too often meet—nay sometimes merit too—
What dare she hope for—what can she expect—
Shall sadly settle on her matron days,
But scored up scorn, and wrongs accumulated?
Else doomed for life—a cramped alternative—
To the unjust obloquy, that in this world,
The wronged, but not the wronger, overtakes.
Drain out her dismal fortunes bitter dregs,
In barren brooding o'er departed dreams,
And cold constraint, and blank celibacy?

DE VARD. Oh! noble Montmorenci! let us hope,
When marriage adds its joys and privileges,
To the soft witchery of those wondrous charms,
That Victor's constant and unvarying love,
Shall banquet on her beauty, and derive
From that delicious feast such dainty food,
That soul and sense voluptuously enthralled
And lost in fond delirium may not know

A dream beyond, but ever be content
To wear love's rosy chains.
MONT. Experience points
To no such happy issue. Know you not
How the old adage runs, that woman's love
Transplanted to possession, grows apace
Through infinite dim developments, but man's
No increment of bulk or stature gains
In that new phase, but as it was removed
From the warm soil and atmosphere of hope—
Or changes not, or changes to decay.
DE VARD. Come. Come. I know the sex,
and dare maintain
They've all a secret preference for a rake,
And as a lover best appreciate him
Not quite a novice in the field of love.
MONT. You talk like an advanced philosopher,
And soar to transcendentalism above
The common ways of thinking. I perceive
Your son's a perfect model in his kind,
And 'twas a sort of special providence
Threw Clemence in his way.
DE VARD. You take me up
Too sharply, Montmorenci! 'Tis not fair
To put this forced interpretation on
My plain unfettered speech. Do I deny
The wrong he's done you. Have I not confessed
His conduct vile, indecent, infamous?

And think you, I'm so careless for myself
That I enjoy the scandal and the talk,
Which mix our names in common disrespect,
And touch my honour too, no less than yours?

MONT. Mix how we may, we differ as the poles.
With you, the scandal seems the only wrong.
With me 'tis part and parcel of the offence—
A grievous aggravation—and no more.
The substance I regard, the surface you.
Great Heavens! to hear you, one might almost deem,
Whatever insults an affianced youth
May offer his betrothed, are soldered up
And made of no account, if only done
With dexterous courtesy and observance due,
Or from the curious quest of prying eyes
Sententiously concealed. But in my mind,
My daughter's peace—my daughter's happiness—
These are the questions—these the chief concern.
What care I for the babble of men's tongues
If she be desolate? That!—for all their talk
And scandal—if she suffer what I fear!
What's fame, or public rumour, or the like,
To be the scapepoat of offences done,
Or bear the weight of individual wrongs?
What's fame more than a glimmering consequence
Of certain actions—various in degree
And quality and kind—the shadowy effluence

From things more real and substantial cast—
A rude delineation—a rough draft—
Transcribed by careless or unequal hands,
And neither wholly true—nor wholly false—
Loose measure and similitude of our lives—
Its form made up of fleeting images
And flickering lights and vague resemblances—
Its colour of the surface of the time
Whereon 'tis pictured. We've our chroniclers
Little and big, and as we live and act
We're more or less renowned. Opinion seems
To write our histories on a wavering page,
That dances up and down, and hits us off
In cramped, or broken, or distorted forms,
But always like. Above—behind—around—
These life-like phantasms flaunt and follow us.
The dusty whirlwind parodies our track.
We scan familiar features in the clouds.
Not much has fame this matter aggravated.
And fall upon whose back the burden may—
Rightly or wrongly—whosoe'er is bound
To bear the scandal and the obloquy—
Even these are but reflected consequences
From his perversity who did the wrong.
But now we talk of scandal, what say you
To enjoy this hussy for a daughter-in-law?
For such,'tis rumoured, your enamoured son
One day will make her.

DE VARD. Rumoured is it, thou sayest ?
MONT. Even so.
DE VARD. Why then 'tis nothing more or less
Than rumour merely.
MONT. Yet unlikelier things
Have often come to pass.
DE VARD. Impossible!
You think to frighten me, but spare your pains.
I'm not so readily scared.
MONT. Young men, we know
Love blindly—madly.
DE VARD. Well. The hottest fires
Burn out the soonest.
MONT. And the girl, I hear,
Is passing beautiful!
DE VARD. And how many such
Fulfil the same ephemeral destiny!
Poor moths! they flutter for a day before
The fiery fascination of a dream.
Then headlong rush upon its flaming jaws,
And burn, and are forgotten.
MONT. Who shall say
What Victor means? He's an original,
And may for change, or very wilfulness,
Take up with constancy for once. Who knows ?
DE VARD. I trust he knows me better.
MONT. My report
I have from my own steward, Jaques Dubois.

He's well acquainted with the damsel's sire,
And teaches me to deem it probable.
This touches you, De Vardois?

De VARD. Not a jot.
The vulgar surmise ever oversteps
The tardy pace of facts. And even say,
That Victor could so far forget himself
As stoop to such a bride, there's time enough
To nip his naughty purpose in the bud.
Be well assured the mischief we deplore
Is capable of remedy, unless
You rashly go about to extirpate
What must be slowly cured. Leave all to me.
Our earliest care must be to separate
These lawless lovers. I'll about it straight,
Having some matters luckily on hand,
Whereon I presently will send away
My son to Paris. Therefore now adieu!
Commend me to the Lady Clemence, who
Lives much in my affection. For her sake
I pray you put a drag upon the wheels
Of your impatience, lest it hurry you
To your own loss, and her deep injury. [*Exit.*

MONT. There might in such a loss be lasting gain.
But still he's right. To break the marriage off—
Fling this white-livered caution to the winds,—
And dream of vengeance only, were to meet

The occasion rather haughtily than wisely.
For I'm infirm and aged, have no son
To stead me in the lists, and dare not owe
To distant kinsman or presuming friend,
So large an obligation as the care
Of seeing Clemence righted. She poor child!
The quarry stricken by this swooping wrong,
I fear would fare no better for the strife,
Whose angry whirlwind and impetuous surge
Must shake and dislocate her future fortune,
And drive it all aground. Too much even now
Hath the malicious notice of mankind
Trenched on her pure and virgin privacy,
Making its delicate and modest ways
A spectacle for fools. Let woman dread
The eye of observation, and avoid
The damning brightness of celebrity.
Respect, that's yielded by the generous soul,
A frank, spontaneous, tribute proudly paid
By strength to sovereign weakness, is denied
By vulgar pride to virtue's very self,
When of her majesty disrobed, she bares
Her naked graces to men's wanton eyes,
And makes her charms familiar. There are flowers
The proper pets and darlings of the dark,
Which wither in the scorching glare of day.
What then is best to do, or not to do?
Let me resolve on nothing, but to bide

The teaching of events. Still—still—methinks,
To bring this truant back to Clemence's feet,
Were better for her peace. She must—must love him,
Trained as she was to it from her infancy—
Her heart by my suggestive wishes swayed—
Schooled by a sense of duty—and inspired
By every motive which could blindly stir
The slumbering instincts of her girlish nature—
Her very soul with his assimilated,
By natural growth and due development—
And her main sustenance from his strength derived.
And ever as they grew her young desires
Have twined themselves around him, and her hopes
Rested on him. And face it as I may,
My heart must do him justice—it must still
With secret voice the general suffrage swell.
How can I reasonably deny him praise?
Is he not noble, valiant, wise, and fair?
So made up of so many excellencies,
That but for this one slip, this single flaw,
Which runs athwart his merit, and impairs
The lustre of his bright and shining parts,
I'd been too proud to see my daughter his?
And thou too! thou! that dost so often gild
Mere inward hollowness—Thou yellow dust!

That blazonest folly with thy specious charm,
And varnishest with thy cold phosphoric glare,
Corruption, meanness, fraud, hypocrisy!
Thou'st somewhat rightly placed thy warrant here,
And set intrinsic value in a zone
Of goodly expectations. To be meek
And Christianly forgiving does not seem
So hard a matter, when a golden prize
Beckons our dull and backward charities.
But here comes Clemence. I must talk with her.
Clemence, my child!

Enter CLEMENCE DE MONTMORENCI.

CLEM. Is my dear father sad?

MONT. My only trouble, Clemence! is in thee.
And were I less than sad, I were a wretch
To look upon that fair and gentle face,
And know thy sorrows.

CLEM. Sorrows! Nay. I've none.

MONT. Dissembler! None!

CLEM. None worthy of the name.
Some crosses I've experienced—petty cares—
Trivial vexations, that like little winds
Rippled the shining surface of my days—
Which might have swelled to tempests, and attained
Sublimest sorrow's sensitive excess,

Had I the soft extravagance indulged,
Or nursed the treacherous weakness of my heart.
But I was taught to discipline myself
For freedom—and endurance—

MONT. Ah! too much—

Too much, my darling child! Thou hast endured.

CLEM. Earth's trials are but as stepping-stones to Heaven.

MONT. By none, or fewer, might one not ascend?

CLEM. 'Tis not our privilege to prescribe the path.

MONT. Of paths prescribed we may prefer the best.

CLEM. Dear father! Think me not unhappy. Nay,
I'm not unhappy—surely. Have I not
High station—ample fortune—health—and friends?
But most of all, in thine affection blest,
What need I? Loving and beloved by thee,
What more can maiden hope for, or desire—
Indulged mine every wish—mine every whim?
Ungrateful were I not to be content,
And I do strive to be so, and forget
What else, remembered, were a dubious good.

MONT. How to forget, or by forgetting cure?

CLEM. To dwell on petty troubles is not wise.

MONT. Psha! tell me child, when Victor last was here?

CLEM. 'Tis just about a month since he was here.

MONT. And then, no doubt, he stayed for half an hour.

CLEM. I took but little note how long he stayed.

MONT. Nay. Answer me. Was it more than half an hour?

CLEM. About that time. Not much, nor less, nor more.

MONT. For half an hour! Eh! Half an hour a month!

CLEM. Often the shorter is the better time.

MONT. And this is how your modern lovers woo!

CLEM. I know not, and I care not, how they woo.

MONT. 'Twixt you and Victor then is ended all?

CLEM. There's nothing ended that was well begun.

MONT. Good Heaven! Are your positions no way changed?

Does Victor love you, girl! or does he not?
Or is his love, affection, or regard,
Or whatsoever he may condescend

To call it—in some inexplicable way—
In some grand transcendental manner gone
In smoke or vapour—spirited all away—
Transmuted, or translated, or sublimed—
No link of habit or observance left
To bind you to each other? Is it so?

CLEM. My duty binds me as it ever bound—

MONT. Thy duty! girl!—

CLEM. And nothing have I lost
In Victor's love, affection, or regard.
Nor, as I think, are our positions changed.

MONT. Meek simpleton! that canst not see thy wrongs!

CLEM. Therein 'tis better not be eagle-eyed.

MONT. It shall not rest here. By the Lord! it shall not.
One day or other shall this lozel learn
How little of his insolence I forget—
My curses on him!

CLEM. Father! curse him not.

MONT. Has he not wronged thee?

CLEM. No. Indeed he has not.

MONT. Has he not broken in upon thy life—
Thy peaceful home destroyed and desolated—
Thy term of maiden quiet dispossessed—
Filched from thine innocent and unwary heart

Its treasure of content—the priceless charm
Of earliest love—the irrevocable bloom
Of virgin passion has he not forestalled,
And rifled and betrayed?—With cool deceit—
Industrious cozenage—deliberate guile—
Has he not won them only, as it seems,
To fling away again in wanton scorn,
As if they were a bauble he'd grown tired of.
Contempt and shame has he not heaped upon
Thy maiden estimation—blotted out
Thy page of youthful promise—and consigned
To cruellest contumely thy blooming years?
What noble suitor now will waste a thought
On Montmorenci's daughter—who will sigh
For his forsaken heiress—who so bold
Through sleety blasts of cutting ridicule,
And scandal's blistering air will force his way,
To bow before thy beauty, and adore
The silent shrine of thy neglected charms?

CLEM. If such must be my fortune, let me learn
Betimes, contentment with my home and thee.
The stings of insult and the darts of scorn
Affect thy Clemence little, while she feels
Thy love suffice, and screen her from the world.

MONT. I cannot screen thee from its censure, child!
I cannot screen thee from its ridicule.

CLEM. And from its censure what have I to fear?
Or from its ridicule?—Nay, let scandal come—
Come with her prying, cold, malignant eyes—
Come with her thousand venomous tongues, and dart
Their forked sharpness on my maiden name—
What can she find to feed on—what old sore
To rankle with her viperous calumnies.
The mirror that we breathe upon contracts
No lasting soil, but clears itself again
By its own brightness. Sinner though I be,
'Tis in Almighty mercy that I trust,
And not from man desire impunity
Or fear reproach. And if neglected, why—
Why must I blush for it? Why, why believe it
A shame in me thus to be left alone,
A flower too simple to be plucked and worn
In proud men's bosoms, who too often wear
Their flowers for freshness and for beauty's sake,
Which when to the outward sense they fade, as must
All lovely things on earth, are flung away
As nothing worth? But I was never plucked—
And still upon my stem in freedom bloom
To God, if not to man, like other flowers
As fair or fairer. Say that it is true
That Victor came to woo me, and in wooing

Found me not worth the pains, was I to blame ?
Not to be gifted with attractive parts,
By mere defect of nature—surely this
To her that knows herself unworthy, brings
Nor shame nor censure. Forward pushing pride
And stilted ostentation can alone
Inflame deformity to sin, or make
A fault of imperfection. Let me bear
The dearth of lovers, as a maiden must.
If such be God's will, shall I dare repine ?

MONT. But touching Victor, girl ! You loved him not ?

CLEM. Must I tell all, my father ! Would you learn
Your daughter's folly ?

MONT. Speak—that I may know
Whether to pity most, or most condemn.

CLEM. How much I might have loved him who can tell ?
'Twas happily not proved. But this I own,
I loved him well—I loved him passionately.
For I was not forbidden to be fond
And my vain eyes were dazzled from the first,
With the full splendour of his manly charms.
He flashed upon me like a sudden noon—
No morning preluded that blinding day—
And I was lighted up before I knew.
My heart took fire at once. I had once believed

That love might slowly ripen, but mine seemed
To waken out of slumber, and resume
A thread of former being. I did not choose
To feign myself a prude, nor thought it strange
How easily duty with affection chimed.
Alas! my fondness into folly grew,
Love held the great monopoly of my life.
All joys and interests towards one fancy turned—
All nobler aims and motives and resolves
Absorbed in feeling like imperfect tones
That run to indiscriminate harmony
In choral music. Thus was I subdued.
The creature had usurped the place of God.
And soon, I fear, had my degenerate soul
Surrendered more than life—than love itself—
Faith—spiritual freedom—strength of will
To that enslaving and predominant sense—
That dear—bewildering—wild idolatry—
That soft delicious languor creeping o'er
My yielding limbs and melting me away
In dreamy bliss. A fascinated thing
I fluttered on the fearful brink of doom.
And only by a miracle I was saved.
Once in the solemn season of my prayers—
When, as my wont from infancy has been,
For thus my mother taught me how to pray—
Alone, beneath night's sacred curtain screened,
Amid the silence of all things without,

The privacy within, upon my bare
And bended knees, I poured my spirit forth
In penitence and humble praise to Him—
The Universal Father—and invoked
The precious interceding blood of Christ—
Calling his Virgin-Mother to my aid—
And summoning to help me many a saint
And angel from the blessed Calendar.
Sweet orisons I numbered on my beads—
Our precious faith's beloved symbol kissed—
When, at the moment it just touched my lips,
I felt exalted by the consciousness
Of spiritual presence—manifest
Nor voice, nor outward vision—but my soul
A rapturous and ineffable joy possessed—
As if the encumbering shadow of this life
Were rolled away—the burden and the doubt
Of sense and conscious being blotted out—
And space and distance and the wall of flesh
No longer stood 'twixt Heaven and God and me.
Then first I knew my danger—then beheld
With clear, unclouded eyes, this human love—
How poor—how mean—how perilous to the soul—
How adverse to salvation! But before
The tumult and the ecstasy were passed—
My heart with the unfamiliar awful sense
Of divine presence fluttering—I besought
Of God, to make me know my duty, and

Vouchsafe me strength to do. My prayer was heard.
Nor many days in blissful meetings passed
Ere looking fondly into Victor's eyes
To read his heart, and yearning to believe
'Twas charged with passionate tenderness like mine,
His coldness by insensible degrees
Became revealed, and now the unsavory truth
Was forced on me in all its bitterness
That I was not beloved. Again, be sure,
I prayed and wept before the throne of grace—
I wept for shame and very feebleness
To think myself despised—I prayed for strength
To fight the tyrant passion in my breast
And conquer in the strife. The strength was given.
Long—long indeed I struggled—long suppressed
The throbs of pride and anguish, till at last
By grace divine victorious, I subdued
The idolatrous affection, and in time
Could gaze upon my idol with indifference—
Nay with a sense of pity for the wrong
Done to a noble nature, in the part
He seemed compelled to act, deceiving me.
And soon, in short, we came to understand
Each other, as it were, without a word
Of explanation. No deceit to him

Was necessary then, for we conversed
Like actors perfect in our several parts,
And calmly travelled through the ceremony
Of being wooed and wooing. No mistrust—
No hate our kindly intercourse impaired;
He grew to love me as a brother loves,
And feelings sprang between us, filling up
The void of passion, by caprice unchilled,
By jealousy unshaken. We were friends
And friends we still remain.

MONT. A pretty tale—
But scarce, I own, to me intelligible.
For wherefore, if thou dost not love him, girl!
Did'st thou consent to wed him?—why keep up
This miserable farce before the world?

CLEM. It was my duty to bestow myself
By thy directions, being well assured
Thou would'st not lead me off the ways of honour.

MONT. You take these matters easily, my child!

CLEM. Indeed! Was my obedience criminal then?

MONT. 'Twas merely cold, my Clemence!

CLEM. I'm not cold.
I love my father. Warmly too, I am sure.

MONT. My child! My child! This is not natural—this
Unmurmuring faith—this bloodless blind obedience.

When did I force thee? How did I constrain
My foolish girl to fling herself away
In loveless wedlock? There's some mystery here:
Oh! what a riddle is a woman's heart!
Some feeling surely—or some show thereof—
In matters of this nature is required.

CLEM. Ah! dearest father! Not the less they feel
Who merge their feelings in the solemn sense
And high supremacy of duty. Some
Natures there are by discipline sublimed,
Who calmly conscious of their own desires,
Still hold them at arm's length, and look upon
The manifold shapes that fair temptation takes
As we regard the pictures of dead friends,
Hung upon walls, to be remembered still,
But never more enjoyed. 'Tis not for me
To dream of soaring to those heights serene
Where sit the saints, like planetary gods,
Placid and cold, smiling upon the storms
And struggles they've passed through—I dare not hope
To assimilate their high self-sacrifice
Or emulate their glory. But if any
There be, however feebly or far off,
Who tread Renunciation's stony track,
And strive by stedfast effort to escape

The tyrannous yoke and bondage of the flesh,
Oh! give them all your pity—all your prayers—
They need them somewhat, oh! be always kind
To their shortcomings—by no counter charm
No hasty—rash—irrevocable word
Evoke the potent spirits they keep constrained
In bare subjection—Never—never think—
Those quick, imprisoned, volcanic elements
Of passion pent and stifled in the soul,
Are conquered so by habit, but at times
They boil and bubble wildly in the deep
Abysses of the bosom, and upheave
Against the pressure of our self-command.

MONT. Thou shalt have vengeance for thy wrongs, my child!

CLEM. I want not vengeance. Far from me the thought.

My part is resignation—my desire
To live in peace—my duty to endure——

MONT. By Heaven! It angers me to hear thee talk.

Such tameness! Such lukewarmness! Why my child!
There have been maidens in heroic days,
Who would themselves have donned the knightly sword,
And in a traitor's blood condignly quenched
The indignant sense of far less cruel wrongs.

CLEM. Such maids belied their sex. Oh! not for me
Be rapiers drawn, or leaden bullets sped.
Sir! I beseech you—I beseech my friends—
To let this matter rest, before it grow
To further mischief. I was never born
The theme of foolish jousts and tournaments,
Or cause of bloody quarrel. Let it rest
My dearest father! So 'twill turn out best,
For I'm not sorrowful as you suppose.

[*Exit.*

MONT. By all the saints! Her patience moves me more
To do her right, as it were against her will,
Than on their own behalf, a thousand tongues
And thunders of her sex, had ever moved,
Invoking vengeance. Ah! Her mother lives
Again in those dove's eyes—that liquid voice—
That sweet forgiving spirit. To find her thus
So little mindful of her cruel wrongs—
To hear what pretty reasons she assigns,
Why Victor, whom she loves with all her soul,
Should not be crossed, or questioned to his hurt—
This melts the heart more—more than eloquence—
Stirs more than sorrow—touches more than tears.
And must I, Clemence! let the matter rest?
Why yes—for now what other course remains?
The heart that starves and hungers for revenge,

Must stay its appetite on meagre fare,
Till the full banquet is by Providence,
Or Fortune, spread. Enough. I bide my time,
To seize the first occasion of revenge.
We Catholics are taught to trust in God—
And wisely so, where human cunning fails.
But when God sends an opportunity—
Shall we not use it—shall we not avail
Ourselves of Heaven's interposition? Why!
Not to do so were rank ingratitude,
And stubbornness, and wilful contumacy.
Who calmly waits and watches long, shall find
Tools to his hand, and matter to his mind.
And who for fitting hour has sense to stay,
His stroke shall fall the surer for delay.

SCENE 2. *A public road passing through a forest.* FRANÇOISE THILOUZE *bearing a bundle of herbs.* JACQUES REYNARD *meeting her.*

JACQUES. Françoise! Sweet Françoise! Stay and talk awhile.

FRAN. Nay let me pass, Good Jacques! Now Jaques! I say,
Be not so free and so unmannerly.
I cannot stay to talk, for I'm in haste.

JACQUES. Ah! times are changed indeed, since this is freedom.

Once, when I met you on this very spot,
'Twas—"Well! what news?"—and "Stop a little, Jacques!"
You would be talking then, and if I chanced
To press your hand a little—you may look—
To press it, Françoise! There was no complaint
Of want of manners. Times indeed are changed.
Too well I wot the reason—Ah! too well.

FRAN. You're so unreasonable. I am in haste.

JACQUES. In haste! Alack! But now 'tis always so.

And business on the pretty Françoise grows.

FRAN. Consider. 'Tis not seemly—'tis not decorous
For a poor girl—a poor and honest girl—
To chat and loiter on a public way.

JACQUES. Decorum! oh! I see—'Twas haste before,
But now, forsooth! it is decorum. Well.
Too many reasons for a thing, they say,
Are worse than none, as proving all are nought.
I mind when once 'twas not indecorous.

FRAN. Nay, there's a difference. Once or twice in a way
Were not particular. Then who'd dare to say
But 'twas mere chance, or some design of yours
In which I'd had no part? But often thus

To stop and trifle—that were indiscreet.
We should be heard of soon where gossips meet.

JACQUES. And who, that's honest, cares what gossips say?

FRAN. True courage never runs in danger's way.

I neither fear opinion, nor despise.
But tongues will wag, and rumours might arise.

JACQUES. A fig for rumours! What have we to fear?

FRAN. Not thou, but I might suffer, Jacques Reynard!

JACQUES. And what hast thou to suffer, or to fear?

FRAN. By slander women suffer more than men.

JACQUES. How thou should'st suffer still I cannot see.

FRAN. I care not that my name should mix with thine.

JACQUES. Oh! that's the danger you so deeply fear?

FRAN. 'Tis not the danger but the talk I fear.

JACQUES. And common talk might dub us lovers—eh?

FRAN. I would not be the theme of talk at all.

JACQUES. But why not lovers? Why not this be said?

Surely to love's not quite so criminal, is it,

That thou should'st shrink thus from its very name?

FRAN. But not being true, I would not have it said.

JACQUES. Then make it true. Yes, Françoise! Pity me.

Long—long—thou knowest I've loved thee passing well.
Why spurn and shun me ever? Ah, thou knowest
I'm not one that would harm thee—not the sort
To do thee wrong—not one of those whose touch
Is fatal—fatal as the breath of plague—
Who for gross ends—for brutal purposes—
Would soil the freshness and the purity
Of our sweet village flower——

FRAN. Away! Thy heart
Is black and base, the while thy glozing tongue
O'erflows with hollow nonsense.

JACQUES. Often thus
When truth and sense grate on our peevish ears
We call them nonsense.

FRAN. I can stay no more
To find thy riddles out, for go I must.

JACQUES. Yet why not lovers—dearest Françoise! why not?
Girl! girl! At least my love is honourable.
'Twould bless—exalt—ennoble—save thee from
Dishonour—

FRAN. Go!—What insolence is this!
Let me have room to pass.
JACQUES. First give me up
That load of thine. I'll wait upon thee home.
FRAN. Thou wilt not, Jacques! I want no waiting upon—
And least of all from thee.
JACQUES. Then hear me—hear me—
If for the last time only. Sweet Françoise!
I love thee—
FRAN. Jacques! on my reluctant lips
Why force a subject I would fain have shunned?
I would not wound thee with a heartless word,
Or call up painful memories, but indeed
'Tis thrust upon me in my own defence.
Thou knowest that I was honest with thee ever—
By no vain trifling tampered with thy love,
Nor made thy passionate hopes my cruel jest.
I told thee from the first I could not love,
And would not wed thee. No. Thou can'st not, Jacques!
But own that I was ever honest with thee.
JACQUES. Perhaps too honest. Ah! the uncertainty
That hath a smack of hope in it—the sharp
But intermitting agonies of doubt—
The see-saw of opposing expectations—
May be a life of hell—but still they're life.

How preferable to this lugubrious void—
This cataleptic torpor of the soul—
This deadly—cold—stagnation of despair!
Oh! pity me, dear Françoise! Pity me.
'Tis your unkindness takes my life away—
Unless I live in hope, I cannot live.
'Tis the last punishment of damned souls,
When hope is taken from them—then does fate
Around them wind its everlasting coil.
Make not my doom more terrible than theirs,
But by a gentler judgment give me back
My hopes—my doubts—with all their agonies.

FRAN. Once you thought differently—once you prayed,
By all the saints and angels ever heard of,
That I'd be candid—that I'd speak the truth,
And free you from suspense—suspense you said
Was hell—was torture harder to be borne
Than even to know the worst. Said you not so?

JACQUES. Ah! that was madness—those were utterances
As of a prisoner on the rack, who raves
What incoherencies come first, to soothe
The immediate anguish, be they false or true
Indifferent—

FRAN. Nevertheless, I wronged thee not
By my refusal. Thine own groundless hopes
Alone betrayed thee.

JACQUES. Come. Let no one boast
Too highly of his honesty, my girl!
No doubt the answer I too hotly pressed,
Was freely given, and I was fairly told
You could not love me—would not marry me.
No doubt. No doubt. Yet there are many ways—
You know it, Françoise—there are many ways
Whereby, without a word's encouragement,
A cunning damsel, conscious of her beauty,
May draw a willing lover to her feet,
To spurn him at the last—ways only known
To her own heart and him. Such things have been.
For love's not wholly blind. There's method in
That seeming madness, and however slight
The hopes it feeds on, still it never hopes
What's quite impsssible.

FRAN. How! You dare not, Jacques!
You dare not—dare not tell it to my face,
That ever by a wanton look or word
I fed your fancies.

JACQUES. Once I asked no more
Than to be near thee. 'Twas enough to gaze
Upon that face in silence and to breathe
Its atmosphere of beauty, unaware
That I was happy. But with consciousness
Was born suspicion. Like unquiet twins,
That to their sire both joy and trouble bring,

They broke upon my rest, and my sweet dreams
With tones of doubtful melody disturbed.
I felt methought a fatal shadow steal
'Twixt Heaven and me, as shutting out the stars—
A something in yourself that signified
A coming change, before the change began.
Oh! wonderful are Nature's instincts—right
Foreseeing is the heart that truly loves!
The shadow was a rival's——

FRAN. Let me pass.

JACQUES. What! scared already!

FRAN. Must I stay to listen
To thine impertinence?

JACQUES. Why should I be nice
When all the world is talking of it? See.
You blush your condemnation. I can read
The truth of all the stories I have heard
Written upon those red and guilty cheeks.
Well may'st thou look ashamed! For better far
To be a poor, but honest, peasant's bride,
Than mistress, leman—call it what you will—
Wer't to the noblest noble of them all.
Yes. Those were moments, till this loving lord,
Showed his sleek visage at thy father's door—
Accursed be the day he lighted there!

FRAN. Go—thou art a false, malicious, slanderer, Jacques!

No mistress am I, but an honest maid.
And lords and nobles—what are they to me?

JACQUES. Thou would'st deny it! Never be so base.

Françoise! Françoise! Add not hypocrisy
And glaring falsehood to thine other sins.
Are these his courtly teaching? But indeed
It should be so. Who knows not that he must,
To compass his abominable ends,
Corrupt thy nature first—must practice on
Its pure simplicity and openness?

FRAN. What ends soever thou, and such as thou,
Out of the abounding malice of your hearts,
Conceive of one, who thought of honours you,
Be well assured of this, by his high soul,
No thought—no purpose ever was conceived,
Save what was fair, and just, and honourable.
Of all impure designs he's innocent
As thou art foul, and filthy, and depraved—
Nor is his blood more noble than his heart.
He would not wrong me—even in thought would not
For all the wealth of worlds——

JACQUES. Enough.

FRAN. How now?

JACQUES. I see too plainly how the matter stands.
Françoise! thou lovest him!

FRAN. Nay. And if I did
What matter's that to thee? Why trouble me?
Thou hast had thine answer. Art thou not content?
I do not love thee, and I never will.
JACQUES. Ah! trust not, Françoise, to his gentle looks.
'Tis but the art your courtly gallants use.
I know the soft, smooth, manner of them all.
He will beguile, thee, girl! to infamy.
If honest now thou art—not long—not long—
Wilt thou remain so. Ah! be warned. Be warned!
FRAN. From thee I want nor warning, nor advice.
JACQUES. Insulting beauty! I shall see thee yet
A flaunting wretch, bedraggled and debased—
A common toy—a mercenary thing—
A creature fed with marketable shame—
Fat with dishonour, pampered on disgrace,
Swoln out and bloated with degrading sins—
This will I see, and seeing will rejoice,
Because my friendly warning was despised.
FRAN. I doubt not 'tis thy heart's malignant wish—
No tongue over a hapless maiden's fall
Would wag so fast as thine.

JACQUES. I've heard it said
He's bent to marry thee—so runs the tale.
And doubtless he's not slack in promising.
For 'tis the wont of all in such a case
Yet if thou heedest him, ah! thou art undone.
Alas! how many a promise of the kind,
That never—never—to performance grew
Is chronicled in our village histories.

FRAN. I'll hear no more of this. Too long
I've heard.
Thy warning springs from rage and jealousy.
'Tis malice shapes—'tis disappointment barbs—
Thy shallow sneers and vulgar calumnies.
With my fair fame thou may'st at pleasure play,
Because I'm but a weak and helpless maid.
But take this warning in exchange for thine—
Keep well thy distance—meddle not with one
That shall be nameless, lest he chance to set
Upon thy serpent throat his iron heel.
And trample thee to atoms. [*Exit.*

JACQUES. Heaven and earth!
Is this Françoise Thilouze—the soft—the sad—
The tender-voiced—whose sweet and timid tones
Would creep into the heart, and nestle there,
And coil themselves in memory—whose meek eye
To humbleness abashed the fervid glance
Of manly passion with its majesty?
Why—here's a transformation! Now she's grown

Into a very Pythoness—her voice
With largest utterance volumed—her fierce looks
Glare like a she-wolf's, when she stands at bay
Beside the den, wherein her sightless young
Complain in chorus of their absent dam,
And whine for her return. How heavenly-bright
Is anger shining in those starry eyes,
Quick flaming up from her indignant soul!
Though Adam fell, was Eden no less fair—
And she's still beautiful, though lost to me.
'Twas rank presumption, Jacques! in thee to love,
Which is the luxury of nobles, for
Like other blessings in this partial world,
To wealth and titles female favour clings
By an unjust necessity, and thus
The spite that fortune does us at our births,
Throughout our after-life repeats itself
In manifold reaction, and begets
A progeny of wrongs. To him that's born
'Mid riches and distinction, is ensured
A patent-right-monopoly of all else
That's enviable below. The lucky few
By vantage of possession, are empowered
To clutch and keep for their own special use,
In the world-scramble whatso'er they will,
Of all the goods the powers above fling down—
But him that in obscurity begins
This fever-dream of life, the baleful shade

With cumulative darkness closing round,
Shuts out at last the common light and air,
And shrouds in cold, impenetrable gloom—
Thus proving true that saying we have often heard—
"To him that hath shall more be always given,
But he that hath not, what he hath shall lose."
To suffer is the peasant's heritage—
To suffer, and be silent. Ah! to whom
Should he complain—to what compassionate power
On earth—in Heaven—shall his appeal be poured?
Time was, when God himself rejoiced to hear
The supplications of the lowly-born.
But now the skies are deaf—the heavenly hosts
Take part against the poor—religion leans
For vested rights—her sacred oracles
Support the prestige of authority.
And God, they say, ordains and sanctifies
The rights and privileges of the strong.
For this the churches ring with joyful praise,
And lips of priests with gladness overflow.
Priests from their pulpits preach tranquillity,
And meekness, and content, and thankfulness.
For what—let crushed humanity reply—
Let man's long-outraged feelings answer them.
Religion cannot teach us not to feel.
The heart asserts its rights, and knows its wrongs

In spite of their monitions. Foolish Jacques!
With idle questions why perplex thy brain;
"Thou hast had thine answer"—did not Françoise
say?
Then take it as she gave it. Go in peace.
In peace! How little they know Jacques who
think
He'll bear these slights and never be avenged.
[*Exit.*

SCENE III. *A forest glade, interspersed with thickets. In the distance, on one side, a cottage, whence* FRANÇOISE THILOUZE *looks out, so as to be occasionally and partly seen. On the other side, a servant on horseback, holding another saddle-horse.* VICTOR DE VARDOIS, *from the cottage, advancing.* COUNT DE VARDOIS.

DE VARD. With circumspection I must him
accost—
Cautious, though firm—nor angry, nor yet weak.
For in his bosom, like a sea that sleeps
Beneath a tropic summer there's a depth
Of proud and passionate sensibility,
Which at a breath of chiding surges up
To swift rebellion—but again subsides
As quickly as it rose—his manly heart
Being by persuasive gentleness subdued

More easily than a woman's. Here I'll sit
And wait his coming. Faith! the shrine is fair
Wherein our goddess dwells. A lovely place—
For dalliance apt—sweetly provocative
Of tender thoughts, and rapturous images.
A place to bill and coo in—by the Lord!—
Where turtle doves should nestle, and, methinks,
Young Love might find his looks reflected round
From every copse—from every shady bower.
Here couched on mossy banks, o'er canopied
By clustering boughs, that let the summer in
Through greenwood glimpses, waited on as it were
By fluttering nymph-like shadows, one might sit
And muse until the soul's magnetic wish
Should summon to our side some wandering fair—
Some Dian of the forest, wreathed in hues
Of mist and rainbow, from her open lips
Exhaling sylvan balms, with earnest eyes
And innocent boldness putting out of face
The forward freedom of audacious love.
Here might one dream was Nature's self beguiled—
That, feebly flying, like a conscious maid,
From daylight's burning glances, she betook
Herself for shelter here, and hid her face—
Her blushing face—behind the whispering leaves,
Whereat more amorous made, the baffled light
Pursues her ever, creeping in disguised,

With base connivance of the treacherous boughs,
To fondle her in secret, and enjoy
Her stealthy kisses. Hark! the prying winds
Forbid to enter, when they would express
Their angry disappointment, won to peace
By the strange beauty of the spot, straightway
Forget themselves in music. Ah! my son!
It grieves me, Victor, to have found thee here.
I've been too chary and too delicate
Of all intrusion on thy private hours,
Hoping thine own discretion, reason, sense—
Would better guide thee towards propriety,
Than an old father's tedious homilies.

VICTOR. Hard words, my father!

DE VARD. Are they not deserved?

VICTOR. What's wrong?

DE VARD. Good Lord! And is there nothing wrong,
That thus you play the truant, son of mine?
Has Clemence then no right to feel aggrieved?
Is this your sense of duty—this your love?

VICTOR. When last I saw the Lady Clemence—

DE VARD. Last!
When was that "last?" Oh Victor! Victor! when?

VICTOR. When last I saw the Lady Clemence, she
Made no complaint.

DE VARD. Oh! casuist! What a loss
The Church has suffered of thy subtle wit!
What though she be too gentle to complain,
Too wise to murmur, are there then no wrongs,
Save those that we resent—no griefs we hide,
From the gross ignorance, from the coarse contempt,
And cold misjudging pity of the world?
Have Clemence's friends no feelings? Are they blind?
Will they be silent ever—ever bear
With patient smiles—with simpering courtesy—
The coldness—the neglect—the scorn—you show
Their gentle kinswoman? By the Lord! it needs
No weather prophet to foretell the storm
Which in that quarter gathers black and fast,
And when it bursts upon our heads—'tis I—
'Tis I must meet the shock—

VICTOR. No. No. My Lord!
If any captious kinsman of the blood
Of Montmorenci throw the gauntlet down
And make a quarrel of his cousin's wrongs—

DE VARD. Enough — pray pardon me! — I know the rest.
That strain's familiar—fashionable too
No doubt. 'Tis thus that many a blustering fool
Quiets his heavy conscience, many a knave
Would fain escape damnation. Twas indeed

A rare invention for redressing wrong
To prop up injury with murder! But
To thee, my Victor! who wast never wont
To learn from multitudes thy rule of life—
Is it not palpable, though with frantic rage
You drown the fretful chorus of complaint
In seas of innocent blood, or sacrifice
To the dark demon of unreasoning power
A heaped up hecatomb of martyred rights,
You merely multiply injustice, and
Accumulate damning proofs against yourselves?
What argument is there in your naked swords?
What reason in your cuts and thrusts? What
right
Has your superior courage, strength, or skill,
To more than justice? May not this be matched
With the opposites of those, and justice fail—
By mere timidity, weakness, want of skill?
Suppose then innocence suffers—say that right
Is by the spite of fortune stricken down,
And trampled in the dust—shall right thereby
Be changed to wrong, or forfeit by defeat
Its sacredness of nature, or exhaust
Its infinite vitality? Still it lives—
I tell you that it lives—and cries aloud,
And finds a refuge in the heart of man,
Impregnable—eternal—where appeals
Are heard against the tyranny of might,

And righteous judgment given. Success, be sure,
Can add no lustre to a righteous cause
Save what's external merely, and injustice,
By partial fortune favoured, only shows
Like the black dews and rottenness of death,
Betricked with tinsel, stuck about with gems,
And mercenary gold. Reflect—reflect—
Before thy sword is drawn—Be satisfied
Thou'rt in the right—and never dare be brave
Until thou'rt surely just. What wrong—what wrong
Has Clemence done thee? Were it not a shame
To stand against her, having on thy side
So little right or reason? Ah! my son!
'Tis thou that art the wronger—thou that hast
Set hands too rudely on this tender flower—
Hast soiled its shining leaves—its petals bruised—
And left it drooping on a broken stem.

VICTOR. You take the affair too seriously, my Lord!

DE VARD. And thou—dost thou make light of of it, my son?
Is it a little matter to be loved
By such as Clemence? What shall make amends
To her for all she loses, or has lost?
Her wealth of love she trusted in your hands—
Embarked the treasure of her maiden dreams—
Mortgaged to you her rich inheritance,

The tilth and produce of prospective years—
Her girlish faith, affections, feelings, hopes—
Which trivial though they seem, are all in all,
To her who gives them, and come back disgraced,
And tarnished, and abused in such a sort,
They never pass again for what they were.
The wounds your scorn has opened what shall heal?
What charm restore to peace and holiness
The sanctuary of her heart that first for you
Unfolded dimly its primeval depths,
And bared its virgin beauty? Oh! my son!
We never outrage with impunity,
A trust reposed in us. On confidence
Our lives are founded, and a general faith
The fabric of society sustains—
Who breaks this holy universal bond,
He is a treble traitor. He betrays
No less the heart that trusts him, than he wrongs
His country and his kind. Such wrongs, be sure,
Must be atoned for heavily—they must
In blood or tears their expiation find—
Or on the wronger draw damnation down.

VICTOR. For this whatever be my share of blame—
The burden of the wrong's not wholly mine.
Let those who for us laid this fatal snare,

Who wrought, and schemed, and plotted, till they had
Pushed a precipitate and heedless nature
Too far for safe or honourable retreat—
Let them, I say, take somewhat of the curse
Of this bad business!

DE VARD. Bad! Thou callest it?

VICTOR. Beyond all remedy, it seems.

DE VARD. But come—
Recrimination's folly. We extend
And aggravate the mischiefs we divide.
We magnify the superficial sore
By vain analysis. The wiser part
Is from the nursing hand of Destiny
To take whatever medicine she provides,
And when she holds the chalice to our lips,
Brimful with cold or bitter consequences—
What matters of our own or others' acts?—
To swallow with a gulp the nauseous draught
Which cannot be refused. Consider well
What promises you've made — what pledges given—
Bonds drawn on earth, and registered in heaven.
Oaths drest in idioms borrowed from above,
Translating mortal to immortal love—
High rites and customs sacred to the skies
Foreshadowing still more sacred mysteries.
Irrevocable thus your contract stands

In faith and honour. What additional strength
It has from mutual confidences drawn
Thou best canst answer, for there's many a vow
That never yet was rounded into speech
By the all-glozing tongue—there's many a word
That never made its way to human ears,
Has pierced the hearts of angels, and is writ
In register against us——

VICTOR. To be true
Needs neither oaths nor vows. Dishonour laughs
At your fantastic bonds—your solemn laws—
And makes short work of mysteries. As for me,
I know my fate—I know to what I'm pledged,
And what I must perform—and to that end
Will strain my best endeavour.

DE VARD. Oh! for shame!
Oh! youth! Oh! Nature! Where's thy manhood? Where?
Thou cold—insensible—thick-blooded boy!
Is Clemence nothing more than common flesh?
Is she not lovely with the loveliness
Whence the old-world painters took their types of heaven?
Boy! hast thou never, gazing on her face,
Felt steeped in holiness, like an atmosphere—
Thy soul—thy senses vanquished by the power
Of spiritual beauty? Such a spring
Foretells a heavenly summer. But who dare

Presage its fulness, when the mystic years
That wait like ministering angels on
Her exquisite development, shall have touched
With finishing fingers her consummate bloom,
And into round and ripe luxuriance swelled
Those slender charms? How from her pensive eyes
As from some sacred dream's mysterious depths
Looks out Infinity! On her forehead smooth
Like sleeping sisters, Thought and Innocence
Lie folded—twined like flowers in bridal wreaths,
Breathing a chaste and quiet harmony.
Just so the peri in the picture looks,
When, half-way up to heaven, the mingled rays
Of Hope and Memory in her glances blend,
With far-off glimmerings from the eternal doors.
Is heaven's bright arch more perfect than her brows?
The spheral revolutions, do they roll
In orbits rounder than her oval cheeks?
Her skin's transparent paleness simulates
The silken tissues of a folded flower
Before it opens unto the artist sun
Its virgin films and hueless purity.
On her closed lips what summer sweetness sleeps—
What lovely life—what boundless beauty stirs—
In their voluptuous motion! Her rich hair,
That flings its wanton masses idly round
That stately neck, caressing it with shows

Of needless ornament, like loose treasures heaped
Before the proud path of a conqueror,
Or rests upon her cheek with modest braid—
Its light was borrowed of the shining clouds
That drawn like curtains round the sleepy sun
And, hovering near his pillow, are inflamed
With lingering glances of his lurid eyes,
And shot with filmy gold. No vulgar clay
Was moulded in her flesh—all the elements
That are her life—all the atoms that compose
And nourish her sweet body—by that use
Are consecrated to eternal trusts
And set apart for ever. She sublimes
Whate'er she touches. Life has nought so poor—
So cold—so barren—but her angel face
Can clothe in forms of beauty, and endow
With bright appearance, shedding a fresh charm
On things unlovely, and infusing soul
Into the trivial and the despicable,
Till like neglected instruments newly tuned
They start to renovated power, and answer
With light and music. This prosaic world—
This sphere of hard and common circumstance—
Brighten before her into dreams divine
And high poetic meanings—But it seems
That I grow garrulous, Victor! by your face.
Are then my praises false, or undeserved?

VICTOR. The Lady Clemence 'tis impossible
To overpraise. I own her beautiful—
Even as a saint or angel beautiful—
And no less mild and wise than beautiful.

DE VARD. Is it then a fate so terrible to call
This fair enchantress yours—this sainted shape—
This sweet embodiment of the angelic soul—
To draw from her sublime and skiey sphere
By gentle invocation, and enthrone
Supreme among your household deities?
With soft familiarity to melt
Upon her awful bosom—unprofaned
By gods or angels—breathe her daily breath—
Oppress and fondle her with nightly love—
Feed on her kisses—surfeit of her smiles—
Make her your queen, companion, counsellor
'Fore Heaven! to dream of such a blessed lot,
So far from wakening in a young man's heart
This strange indifference, or unnatural hate,
Might madden him with joy.

VICTOR. I hate her not.
In me nor joy, nor horror she inspires.
These feelings on no formal vows depend.
We cannot love or hate as others wish—
As duty bids, or policy requires.
The heart is privileged, and our free desires
Rebel against the tyranny of bonds

They've not subscribed to. The completest
mould
Of mind and form—the loveliest nature shrined
In fairest framing of consummate flesh—
Draws no responsive passion from the soul,
Against the light of its perfection sealed.
The effect must still reciprocate the cause.
Attraction on affinity depends.
In mutual action fitness is presumed—
Proportion—correspondence—wherefore else,
Should yonder glorious sun's creative rays
Our valleys and our plains with genial warmth
Impregnate, yet on the primeval snows
And everlasting ice of Alpine hills
Fall chill and feeble—why through iron ways,
Courses the invisible and mysterious fire,
Which the bright mirror's polished face repels?
'Tis my misfortune to be dull, my lord!
Where dulness seems a crime—but you that more
Justly appreciate the fair lady's charms,
Abounding where I fail, might easily,
Methinks, this unintentional slight repair,
And fill the perilous breach with happier vows.

DE VARD. The path of duty to my son, I've
shown.
What more I pray you is in a father's power?

VICT. To more than one that path is open, Sir!

DE VARD. What means the boy?

VICTOR. That you should marry her.

DE VARD. Your future bride!

VICTOR. Not mine yet, more than yours.
And as a mother I could love her well.

DE VARD. This is but trifling. Why should I, my son!
Bear the sad burden of your broken vows?
'Twas not I made them—'twas not I who pledged
My faith and honour, nor on me will fall
What shame accrues when faith and honour fail.

VICTOR. Fear not for me. I know my faith is pledged.
And to be brief, my lord! I'll marry her.

DE VARD. But is your conduct quite consistent with
Your obligations?

VICTOR. Who believes me bound
To pin me to the Lady Clemence' side,
Or dally in her lap my lazy hours?
I deem it quite consistent with my vows,
While free, to enjoy my freedom as I will.

DE VARD. What! Is it decent—is it honourable—
For ever absent from your pining bride
To waste your manhood in a minion's arms—
A hireling nurse, that to thy babe of love,
Coldly abandoning her purchased breast,
Weans it from one that yearning to be fond,

Had yielded to its lips a sweeter stream
Of healthiest nourishment.

VICTOR. What means my lord?

DE VARD. I mean the brazen baggage that abides
In yonder cottage.

VICTOR. Surely 'tis not just
To speak in cruel—harsh—contemptuous—terms,
Of one you know not.

De VARD. What is this I hear?
Shall not the truth be told?

VICTOR. 'Tis not the truth.

DE VARD. What folly's this?

VICTOR. She's innocent—

DE VARD. By the Lord!
The boy's bewitched. Was Montmorenci right?
What brings thee here so often then, I pray,
Haunting her precincts, like a jealous ghost,
That guards a buried treasure? What employ,
Or function, or capacity, or trust,
Thy constant presence in this spot demands?
Her innocence hath she put in pawn to thee,
Or made thee keeper of her virtue, boy?

VICTOR. If she be otherwise than pure and true,
There's neither purity nor truth in heaven.

DE VARD. The matter looks alarming, by the Lord!

I fear this wicked slut's pernicious arts,
And his temerity, will work us woe.
My son! 'Tis rumoured thou would'st marry her.

VICTOR. With idle rumours what concern have I?

DE VARD. Indeed I cannot deem thee so depraved
As to have dreamed even of so base a thing.
But so 'tis said.

VICTOR. I care not what is said.

DE VARD. Come. Come. Be docile. Run not off the course,
Because your reins are free. My words, I trust,
Will set your judgment working, and in time,
May leaven it with sense. Root up, my son!
Root up this puerile folly ere its growth
Outtop your resolution. Now attend.
I've work for thee at Paris. There's a coil
Of an old business matter got unwound—
Touching our title to the Meadow Farms—
Which threatens litigation. That old fox,
Marrand, of course, is at the bottom of it.
You must away this moment, and consult
The legal oracles, and secure the best
Advice upon our side. The king's at Court.
He'll doubtless show thee favour as before.
The matter presses. I would have thee start
Within an hour at furthest—

VICTOR. May I not
Have time for preparation?
DE VARD. There needs none.
Grey Emperor's in the stable, high in flesh,
And wanting exercise. Our banking friends
Will furnish you what money you require.
And pause a moment on your way to bid
Adieu to Clemence. That's imperative.
I wish you a fair journey. Come. Away. [*Exit.*

Enter FRANÇOISE THILOUZE.

FRAN. Thy father! Was it not?
VICTOR. Even so.
FRAN. How stern—
Yet anxious and perplexed he looked, as one,
Who against baffling circumstances fights!
VICTOR. Would he had only seen thee, my beloved!
All flushed and rumpled with the sportive force
And rude caress of Nature—on thy cheeks
The amorous impress of the kissing winds—
Thy blue eyes luminous with bewitching joy—
This vest, that with bewildering difficulty
The budding ripeness of thy bosom sheathes,
Trembling above the treasure it conceals,
And stirred with tumult of mysterious charms.
The veriest devil of strife or tyranny
Would melt in momentary holiness,

And Hell for awhile forget itself to Heaven,
In such a presence.

FRAN. Victor, too, is sad.
Some trouble sits upon his manly brow.
May Françoise know it?

VICTOR. When authority,
However sacred, would compel the heart
To swerve from Nature, surely it provokes
And justifies rebellion.

FRAN. Cast such thoughts,
Like serpents, from thee. Is thy sire unkind?

VICTOR. Obedience must have bounds. It cannot reach
Beyond the possible.

FRAN. Alas! my love!
Ah! Victor! Victor! Is it come to this?
Must now the doom my sin and folly caused—
The bolt my proper punishment deserved—
Be launched upon us both, and thou be crushed,
Because I was too careless of thy good—
Too fond—too selfish—still to bid thee fly,
Or warn thee of the danger thou hast earned,
In loving me? There yet—there yet is time.
I feel a solemn duty must be done,
Which yet I shrink from doing. Cruel duty!
And desperate necessity, when love
Its life must threaten with the mortal act
That very life requires!

VICTOR. How now, what mean
These cold, sad words—these melancholy tones—
Which hang like icicles on golden doors—
Mocking the beauty and the inward warmth
Which their cold splendour brightens and adorns!

FRAN. Even love may sin by tender selfishness
Or by excess, and yet of loving sins
The loving heart not easily repents.

VICTOR. No more of this, my girl! No more of this!
Why to thy bosom hug these gloomy thoughts,
Till warmed to serpent-life they hiss and glare,
And coil around thy faith with poisonous clasp?

FRAN. We drift—we drift upon the fatal shoals
That threatened us afar. Alas! Alas!
Upon a woful voyage were we bound.
A thriftless venture was thy love for me.
And fortune meant to mock thee when thy bark
Of life she burdened with that foolish freight.

VICTOR. That sinners are we all, the Church attests.
But to the sins of others thine are bright,
As is the morning sunshine to the depths
Of starless midnight. Ah! what sense of sin,
Dear, innocent thing! or memory can be thine,
To bow thee down with this undue remorse—
This sad extravagance of mistempered woe?

FRAN. Alas! to love thee—was it not a sin?
Else wherefore do I feel, for evermore,
One quiet shadow cross my peace of mind?
Ah, me! The girlish beauty—the mild eyes—
The gentle lineaments of her I've wronged—
Rise up in dreams before me and upbraid
This happiness that I've usurped too long.
To that sad chamber still my fancy turns,
Where sits a fairer and a nobler love,
Pining for thee in vain! Oh! was it not
A crime to rob her of thy loving heart,
And make her desolate?

VICTOR. The crime was mine—
Be mine the sorrow too. God knows, by thee
I came unsought, uncared for—thrust myself
Upon thy coy retirement—I subdued
By passionate force and importunity
Thy cold, reluctant, maidenly reserve.
Of all connivance—all participation—
Thou'rt quit, save this—God made thee what thou art
In form, but more in nature, beautiful.
I could not choose but love thee. Yes—oh! yes.
'Twas my own willing, unsolicited act
Condemned me here to sweet imprisonment,
And chained my fortunes in thy circling arms.
Oh! stifle me with kisses. Let me swoon
Into the life of love, and penetrate

In trance the spheral zones of bliss, and feel
Responsive to my touch the heaven of joy.
At least we hold the present in our hands—
We grasp the palpable and the actual here.
No mocking phantasm this—no cheating dream—
But warm—familiar—breathing happiness.
Each bounds for each our mutual universe.
All else is futile, unsubstantial air—
The shadowy unrealities of space,
By glimmering spectres crossed. The worst may
come,
But love shall strengthen us whate'er betides—
Shall give us courage to defy the worst.

FRAN. It must be said, my Victor!—must be
done.
We part for ever. Weak, indeed, I've been—
Who knew my duty—felt it in my heart—
Yet always feebly tampering with the right,
Still let the accumulative burden press
Upon me till it crushes. Yet for thee—
For thee alone—I faltered. Mine own joys
Were nothing in the balance. Yes. I've lived
The very life of love, however brief.
For me but once so happy to have been—
An hour—a moment even—to have enjoyed
This sweet—sweet dream, were more than I
deserved.
This makes me conscious I've not lived in vain.

But now thy father's angry voice is raised
Against our wishes—hear me to the end—
When to be longer happy as we were
Must work thee loss of honour—fortune—peace—
Must set thee floundering in unseemly strife—
Must drag thee down from nobler destinies—
The time is come to say—"My Victor! Go!
Let not thy life unprofitably waste
And burn itself away—oh! be no more
Debased and burthened with my humble love.
I dare not owe thee to a father's curse,
And we must part for ever!"

VICTOR. Be it so.

FRAN. Is it agreed, then?——Ah!—

VICTOR. Why not? When both
Are in accord, 'tis easy to agree.

FRAN. Alas!

VICTOR. How now? Why turn so pale, and start,
At the very echo of thine own resolves?

FRAN. I told thee I was weak. I felt a pain
Here in my heart. No matter. That is past.
I thought I should have found thee obstinate—
Hot, deaf, intractable, peremptory—
Still loth to leave me, clinging to the last,
To one so long by former love endeared.
I thought with all the power of all my prayers,
With absolute arguments, resistless words,

Over and over again, I must have urged
This fatal—cruel—sad necessity,
Yet scarcely had persuaded thee to go.
But now I see 'tis better as it is.
Heaven sends thee courage to forget me soon.
A more congenial sphere—a brighter bride—
Shall win thy willing heart, and whirl thee round,
In giddy circles of oblivious joy.
And thou shalt quickly smile, and be consoled,
Nor cast one lingering and regretful gaze,
On the sad maiden whom thou'st left behind.

VICTOR. Oh! rain down Heaven upon me with thine eyes—
Make my lips holy with thy holy tears.

FRAN. Go. Victor! to the Lady Clemence go.
Dry up the cruel tears that undeserved
Wear out her innocent eyes, and hollow out
Untimely furrows in her blooming cheeks.
Console her for the sorrows I have wrought her
With the rich treasure of thy precious love.
But with my name, I charge thee, never wound
Her tender ears, nor tell her how I loved.
That thought might prove a spectre to her joy,
And haunt her happiest hours, and turn the light
Of her new hopes to gloom and wretchedness.

VICTOR. Wretched am I, recalling her to mind.

FRAN. 'Tis but for thine own sake I bid thee go.

From love alone I draw the dreadful strength
To make this dreadful sacrifice of love.

VICTOR. After this fashion then we say farewell?

FRAN. Alas! when duty with imperative voice
Commands, we may not murmur or resist.

VICTOR. And Françoise finds it easy to forget?

FRAN. Oh! Victor! Easy!

VICTOR. Why should it be thought
For one more easy than another, pray?

FRAN. As being of one the duty, not of both.

VICTOR. And might not duty teach thee to forget?

FRAN. Love, that partakes the nature of the soul,
Is, like the soul, immortal.

VICTOR. Nobly said.
And why, in the name of manhood, why should I
Be less enduring, or less brave, than thou?
I swear it—

FRAN. Swear not lest thou change again.
How readily alas! men scatter vows!
Thine own wish was it not a moment since,
That we should part?

VICTOR. Away with such a wish!
'Twas half in jest, and half in earnest, said.
On pressing business, by my father sent,
I go to Paris.

FRAN. 'Tis an opportunity
That Heaven provides. Oh! seize it to sustain
Thy struggling resolution. Oh! my friend!
My love! Be strong—be valiant to subdue
Thy dearest wishes, when they wildly fight
With God—religion—duty—sense of right.

VICTOR. Are love and nature never in the right?
Has the poor heart no privilege to be heard?

FRAN. Like dangerous casuists, love and nature speak
With self-deluding voices. And the heart
Confessed accomplice of its own desires,
Were scarce a fitting judge when these offend.
Is honour nothing? All thy promises,
And vows, and obligations, empty sounds?
Think of the Lady Clemence—think of her.

VICTOR. On every side my path—on every side—
A Scylla thunders, or Charybdis roars.

FRAN. Thy vows are hers—oh! Victor!—hers alone.

VICTOR. Yet equally to thee my vows were given,
And my heart sealed them with a double seal.

FRAN. Alas! thy vows to her were uttered first.
They still remain uncancelled—unrecalled—
And take precedence of all after vows.

VICTOR. My vows to her scarce voluntary were,
Since by the fraud and treachery of our sires,
From my confiding folly they were won,
And never ratified by mutual love.

FRAN. Our reason's rightly held accountable
For acts our reason judges. And at least
She loved thee, surely, and 'twere most unjust
To fix on her the penalty of frauds
She had no part in—

VICTOR. Never by her lips
Was made confession of her love for me.

FRAN. How could she help loving?

VICTOR. I will not hear
Another word. Let all discussion end.
Here's logic that all other logic shames.
Thus—thus to fold thee round with conscious arms—
To breathe thy breath—to kiss away thy tears—
Against ten thousand promises prevail.

FRAN. My heart! my heart! Oh! cruel! to persist!
Ah! me, within this bosom's citadel,
A fond confederate thou too surely hast,
Who still against my better reason sides,
And mocks my exhortations evermore.

VICTOR. Follow that inward—that unerring—voice.
Heaven speaks in that.

FRAN. 'Twas written in the skies

That we should love. Alas! 'twas written too
That I must yield thee to the nobler lot
Thy destiny provides.
VICTOR. Far otherwise
Following my heart for teacher, and infused
Therefrom with instincts of sublimer faith
Than thine, I read the sacred oracles.
Our lots are one—our destinies the same—
And round one centre, in co-ordinate spheres.
Like double stars, our mutual lives revolve.
FRAN. Farewell! Oh Victor!
VICTOR. This is not the way
We part, believe me.
FRAN. If a maiden's prayers
Be answered, the prolific grace of Heaven
Shall shower its richness round thee, and thy life
Be lapped in blessedness. Farewell!
VICTOR. With thee
All blessedness of mine begins and ends.
Without thee Paradise were barren—Heaven
Itself a hell for me.
FRAN. Farewell!
VICTOR. Be sure
When I return from Paris, I'll defy
The Montmorencis, and my father too.
FRAN. Farewell!
VICTOR. So be it, till we meet again. [*Exit.*
FRAN. Is that the end? I fear there's something more

To come. The sky looks threatening overhead,
And my weak footstep wakes a hollow sound.
Watch o'er him, heavenly powers! Your forked
wrath
That slumbers in the sulphurous banks, discharge
Alone on me. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!

ACT II.

THE CONSPIRACY.

SCENE I. *A street in a village in front of a cottage. Enter* JACQUES REYNARD, *walking slowly as in thought.*

JACQUES. Moments there are when, in the life
of each,
In mortal conflict good and evil meet,
And strive for absolute empire o'er the soul.
This mystery was of old foreshadowed in
The wars of devils and angels. Then, it seems,
We pause between two portals. Either way
Passion or chance our doubtful fates incline,
And ominous voices whispering in our hearts,
Foretell the fearful secret of our lives.
Just so 'twas once with me. Had she been kind,
Had the grim stars on my affection smiled—

It had been as nothing for me to have heaped
The hoarded substance of ten thousand lives
Like dross beneath her feet, and measured heaven
By whatsoever good she bade me do.
But now behold? She thrusts me out of hope—
Standing before me with a flaming sword,
While Eden lies beyond. Then welcome hell!
Welcome the darkness of the infernal deep!
Help me, ye devils! help me, gloomy gods!
Despair is strong—aye stronger than ye all.
And in that school the soul that's disciplined—
That builds defiance on eternal wrongs,
Compels your service and obedience. Thus
I call upon you now, mysterious powers!
But not in adoration. It shall be
Your task to feed my measureless revenge,
With fitting opportunities. Behold!
In answer to my call, a woman comes.
Can we contrive no mischief out of her?

Enter MANON THIERRY, *at the door.*

MANON. Why Jacques! Friend Jacques! how heavily thou lookest!

JACQUES. Let fools walk garnished with continual smiles.
If Jacques look sombre, 'tis that Jacques must think.

MANON. The saints defend us from all gloomy thoughts!
But come. What news? What of my cousin, Jacques?
How speed you there?
JACQUES. That story soon is told.
My speed was thence with speed to be dismissed.
Thou knowest too well, cold looks and colder words,
And angry frowns my general fare have been,
Since young de Vardois took to poaching there.
MANON. But tell me—tell me, is it really true,
De Vardois 'll marry her, as people say?
JACQUES. You should know best, since you're her cousin, girl!
While neither kith nor kin have I to boast,
And now I've lost her, 'tis all one to me,
Whether she be his minion or his bride.
MANON. Believe me, I've not seen her many a day.
She comes no more to visit, as she used.
Proud minx! perhaps her fortune puffs her up.
But yet I do not envy her—not I.
JACQUES. How! Envy! Envy her! What means the girl?
MANON. 'Tis rumoured—is it not?
JACQUES. Suppose it be.
Since when were village rumours gospel truths?

MANON. He will not marry her?
JACQUES. I said not so.
MANON. Why then he'll marry her.
JACQUES. I said not so.
MANON. Provoking wretch! There's something in thy face
Awakes my curiosity. Come now.
Let's chat awhile together. There are times
When thou canst take Discretion off her guard,
And charm the sober nymph Propriety,
With the rich freedom and familiar flow
Of thy fine nonsense. But an April wind
Is not more humoursome. Come. Sit thee down.
Be sociable. Put on a pleasant face,
And give thy tongue the reins. Sit down, I say.
Rude fellow! Must I for so small a grace
Become thy suitor? Ah! how many a youth
That is to thee an eagle to an owl,
Would give his ears—aye—only to be asked
By Manon thus to sit at Manon's side!
JACQUES. Dost thou believe it? Come.
MANON. I do not—I.
JACQUES. 'Tis true, nevertheless.
MANON. How say'st thou?
JACQUES. True.
MANON. No jesting?
JACQUES. True.

MANON. He'll marry Françoise?

JACQUES. Must.
I make a song of it, to please thee? Well.

The heir of Vardois for his bride shall choose
Françoise, fair daughter of the hind Thilouze;
Thus shall a noble lord a peasant wed,
And low-born beauty climb a noble bed;
On both propitious smile the powers above,
Endowing her with fortune, him with love.
Still may Heaven's favour the fond pair attend,
Still love with fortune beautifully blend,
Confirm their faith with conjugal rewards,
And make her mother of a line of lords.

MANON. Cease—cease this folly, Jacques! I pray thee, cease.

JACQUES. Are these your feelings for your father's niece?

MANON. Your songs melodious as a raven's are.

JACQUES. 'Tis not the music, but the words that jar.

MANON. I take no heed of music or of words.

JACQUES. But Manon! Manon! is not this great news?

MANON. Great news, indeed.

JACQUES. And good news too, is it not?

MANON. Françoise is lucky.

JACQUES. Lucky! Yet thou sighest.
Hast thou no pleasure in thy cousin's luck?

MANON. I'm sure with all my heart I wish her joy.

JACQUES. Another sigh! Why, Manon! what is this?

MANON. Begone! Thou spiteful monster! Mock me not.

JACQUES. Dare Manon tell her thoughts? 'Twas only now
I heard her, sighing, wish her cousin joy.
But what does Manon wish her in her heart?

MANON. Begone! I say. Thou growest too insolent.
I'll talk with thee no longer.

JACQUES. As for me
I bear no malice, Manon! Nay. I'm glad,
Since Françoise marries, that she marries well.
Of course she'll keep our company no more.
When lords and ladies her companions are
We cannot blame her to look down on us.
Again then let me hear thee wish her joy.

MANON. Have I not bid thee trouble me no more?

JACQUES. With such a bridegroom can she fail of joy?

MANON. Nay, trust me, he's a paragon.

JACQUES. By the Lord!

He walks the living wonder of the times.
What though he's wronged me—I've an honest heart—
I can be generous—never would I stoop,
By lies to under-average his deserts,
Or stint him of his proper meed of praise.
I take him for the flower of all his peers—
The model of his order and his kind—
A measure, index, and example set,
Of noble manhood. In defining him,
Is manly nobleness itself defined.
All fair proportions, and all lovely parts,
Are summed up in him. Nothing good but seems
As if it touched the limit of excess,
In building him together—nothing bad
Has room to enter and bestow itself.
Who would be braver is but rash and vain,
Or wiser, only mad. The loftiness
That would not lose its head in cloudy pride,
Must equal his—the affability
That lower would descend is merely mean.
In short—"got up regardless of expense"—
For Nature was a prodigal at his birth,
And tried experiments, aiming at a pass,
Beyond herself, and flung her gifts away,
To make him what he is, a perfect type,
Of all most loved and most admired in man.

MANON. He passed this very morning down
the street——

JACQUES. Indeed!

MANON. Nor could I but admire the while
With what a careless and unconscious grace
He swayed the mad moods of his restive steed,
Turning the creature's wildest caracoles
To pretty gambollings. Such a steed methinks
As none but he could master. From its eyes
Glared hissing fire-balls—its hard snortings felt
Like strokes of thunder—flaming far behind
A tail rich-black—its high predominant neck
Wide-arched and angry as a lowering sky—
His streaky mane wrote figures on the ground
As distant lightnings on the muffled East
Write brilliant hieroglyphs. Oh! yes he seemed
As it were transfigured—brightening as he passed
To form angelic—the familiar sun
Dancing attendance on him like a slave,
To trick him out in gems, to clothe in gold
His cloudy plumes, to bathe cuirass and helm
In floods of burning splendour——

JACQUES. Down the street
To Michael's cottage?

MANON. Eh!

JACQUES. Go on. Go on.

MANON. Plague take the fellow! Why should
I go on,

When I've no more to say? Go on! Indeed!
Just for thy pleasure must one talk and talk?

JACQUES. Well. No offence.

MANON. And gracious! How he stares!
Away with thee—thou gross ill-mannered wretch!

JACQUES. Ah! me—upon a face so beautiful
Is it then a crime to gaze?

MANON. Away with thee!

JACQUES. Would centuries so employed be wasted?

MANON. Psha!

JACQUES. Girl! 'Tis too late to turn away thy face.
Seeing that I've read its fiery secret there.
This youth transfigured to an angel's form
Has played the very devil in Manon's heart.

MANON. I hate thee, fellow!

JACQUES. But who wonders at it?
'Twas always so. 'Tis thus with all of them.
What woman ever set her eyes on him
And rested after? 'Tis the state's concern
And should be looked to. They must shut him up,
Else, when he weds, the nunneries will be filled,
And river-banks be made a spectacle
Of public sorrow, wofully bestrewed
With the white bodies of despairing maids.

MANON. Who does not know that Jacques is full of gibes?

JACQUES. Some gibes fly wide, but mine the matter hit.

MANON. A denier for thy trash! I scorn it all.

JACQUES. Some strive to look the scorn they cannot feel.

MANON. Ah! get thee gone. I hate thee more and more.

JACQUES. High minded Manon! Is thy proud heart touched?

MANON. Dost think I burn to rob her of her prize?

How seldom are unequal matches blest!
Who knows not wedded happiness avoids
That hearth where violent contrasts or extremes
Of birth or fortune in conjunction meet
By chance or by design? From such a doom
May Heaven exempt my cousin, and her case
The rare exception prove! But as for me
I dare not strike so high—my lot is lowly.
With lowly lovers let me rest content.

JACQUES. For instance—with Pierre Bloui.

MANON. Name him not.
Thou knowest how cordially I hate the wretch.

JACQUES. But ah! he dotes — dotes fondly upon thee.

MANON. Dotes! Nay when doth he otherwise than dote?
The man, who knows not?—is a proper fool.

JACQUES. Love's fiery ordeal where's the brain
can bear?
Pierre ventured within reach of Manon's eyes
And got a sun-stroke. His bewildered wits
Were by thy glances tricked out of their spheres
And spirited quite away. But Manon! hark!
I wonder at De Vardois. Had his choice
Lighted on thee, 'twere nothing wonderful.
Françoise is tender, pitiful, mild, and soft—
Thou full of spirit, and mocks, and wicked mirth.—
She shrinking as a flower that hides away
And folds its tender petals from the sun
And cowers into the shade—thou bursting forth
As it were to broad and glaring light of day,
Quick, forward, daring, resolute, dazzling, gay—
She drawing out of books and Nature, food
To fit her calm and meditative hours—
Thou apt for action, with audacious glance,
Measuring the pomps and grandeurs of the world,
And making them thine own — She formed to
charm
And bless some sober honest villager
With simple joys, serene and loving looks,
Holy and sad, building her quiet thoughts,
Like swallows' nests, beneath the eaves of home—
Thou born to be a monarch's bedfellow,
To glut thy heart's ambitious appetite,
Upon the golden gleam of palaces,

The glare of gems, the crush of equipages,
The lustre and the lusciousness of feasts—
Yes—often, often—in our rustic talk,
When thou and Françoise were the double theme
And moved divided admiration, all
Agreed in this—thus spoke the general voice—
"Manon—proud Manon—soars too high for us"—
I wonder, girl!—I wonder at his choice.

MANON. Unconscienced flatterer!

JACQUES. Place him but an hour
Beside thee—let him see thee—let him feel
The might—the magic—of that witching face—
That! for his faith to Françoise!—By the Lord!
'Twould peril it much, or I'm a Saracen.

MANON. You're a rank hypocrite, Jacques! I'm sure of that.

JACQUES. Look you, the Lady Clemence he betrayed.
And girl! What's in thy cousin to deserve
Or hope a better fate?

MANON. Malign him not,
The Lady Clemence never was his choice.
Who knows not he was dupe and victim both,
Of two designing—selfish—bad old men,
By whose dark policy was his faith ensnared,
But his heart never? So it came in time,

That whom he could not honourably forsake,
He learned to hate.

JACQUES. Well—honourably or not—
He did forsake her. And 'twas Nature's work.
The gloom of desolation drove him blind.
He felt the need of something to be loved,
And the first bait capricious accident,
Made dance before him, greedily he snapped
Into his hungry heart. I know Françoise.
Her quiet nature cannot satisfy
Or long content him. Something more he'll need—
Some food of finer relish to fulfil
His nobler cravings. Change again he must.
But the most changeable not for ever change.
The roving bee selects his home at last.
And what if Victor settle down on thee?

MANON. Dost think to gull me with so wild a jest?

JACQUES. I ne'er was more in earnest.

MANON. Ah! no doubt
Thou'd'st gladly bind thy rival in my arms,
And those who love can hate. But after all
These are but idle fancies.

JACQUES. Not so idle.
Something I know—but frankness frankness draws.
I can be close as thou.—

MANON. Provoking fiend!
Well then—I love him. There. The truth's
out now.
Oh! often at this door I've watched him pass
In hope some casual glance—some stray regard—
Might lodge me in his memory to attend,
The close companion of his journeying thoughts.
Alas! He never—never—noticed me,
Unless as portion of a picture, drawn
And grouped with common things.
JACQUES. Nay—never sigh.
MANON. This talk's the grossest folly.
JACQUES. Wilt thou then
Be distanced in the race by one that else
Was born to lag behind—to be thy slave—
See her ascend by favouring accidents
To fortune's fairest heights, and bear away
This glorious prize, which beckons thee to grasp,
And wrench it from her?
MANON. How can this be done?
JACQUES. What says thy heart?
MANON. It bids me hope, but still
Fails to assure my reason. Speak. From thee
I look for counsel.
JACQUES. Patience!
MANON. Nothing more?
I thought—I thought of some immediate scheme
Hatched in that sly and politic brain of thine,

Else not so easily had'st thou cajoled
My secret from me.

JACQUES. Patience! Every seed
Is sown in doubt and darkness, but in time,
To the eye that watches and the foot that waits,
Will surely spring. But, hold! who comes this way?
Why 'tis your hero, the disconsolate Pierre—
Console him, girl!

MANON. The monster—let me fly.

JACQUES. No. Manon! Stay. He must not be repulsed.
He's just the tool to use in time of need.
Be sportive with him, as thy wont has been.

MANON. Such sport disgusts me. Playing lubber eels
With salmon tackle!

JACQUES. I conjure thee, stay.
The solid Pierre looks something out of sorts.
There seems a quaint uncouth perplexity
In his owls' eyes, and on his blubber cheeks—
Stay—stay—

Enter PIERRE BLOUI *with a wolf's paw.*

How now? what troubles thee, my friend?

PIERRE. 'Twas ever thus with Pierre—'twas ever thus.
These evil chances dogged me from my birth.

I never mount me on an ass's back,
In holiday garb apparelled, to attend
Fair, feast, or merry-making, but of course
Some tricky devil must straight possess the beast
And spirit him on to fling me—and where else
Unless into the middle of the muck
Before a crowd of gazers? When have I
Gone coursing, but some prowling gamekeeper,
Or village constable, went coursing too
Upon my very traces? If I reap,
'Tis sure to set in with a three months' rain.
But when I sow then drought must settle down.
And look! Not yet my plaguy fortune tires
Of persecuting me. But yesterday
Quite in the thick of the woods my snares I laid—
With all my best dexterity contrived—
You'll own I'm dexterous at this work—so planned—
So strewed—so sorted—never a wolf that lived,
And loitered near, could have escaped, unless
By devilish spite or machination foul.
And look!—how near the mark my purpose failed!
Look! of my skill here's proof irrefragable—
For, grappled by its shank, the creature slips

Out of my clutches, leaving this behind.
A trophy, Jacques!—a trophy.

JACQUES. As I live
A real wolf's paw, which yesterday, no doubt,
Some hairy ruffian owned.

PIERRE. I know the beast.
A huge she-wolf—among these parts renowned—
Strong as a bear, and cunning as a fox.
Our shepherds know her by her bloody deeds—
Her bloody work among their flocks and herds.
Alack! to think she should escape me so!
So nearly taken.—

JACQUES. 'Twas a strange escape—
So strange, almost miraculous it appears.

PIERRE. That's it—'twas not in nature. I believe
The devil himself has somehow had a hand
In playing me such a trick.

JACQUES. Why not? Why not?
Since Satan loves no trapping but his own.

PIERRE. This creature's one of his familiars, Jacques!
I'm positive. There are Jean and Charles Legros,
Would take their oaths of it, whose fold, we know,
Was entered twenty-three successive nights—
'Mid driving sleet and rain, for the most part—

And, every night, the fattest of the flock
Was taken away bodily—how 'twas done,
None knew, not even the men on watch—without
A sound or sign of strife—no traces left,
Or footmarks printed on the slimy soil.
And little Paul, the wandering pedlar-boy,
Who near the three cross-roads, at fall of dusk,
Saw a huge wolf before his very eyes,
Translated to a monstrous bird, four times
An eagle's size, which straight before him sprang,
And soared away with shrill, unearthly screams.

JACQUES. For once at least the devil has met his match,
And comes not off scot free. But hold! this limb
Of Satan—let me handle it—by Heaven!
The same—ye powers of mischief and revenge!
My prayers are heard—

MANON. Why, Jacques! what devilish thought
Has set thine eyes like meteors all aflame?

PIERRE. But tell me, for thou'st read and studied much,
And art a scholar, Jacques! What are the signs
Whereby, when people are bewitched, we learn
Their sad condition, feeling as it were
The pulse of their disease, before it taint
The general course and tenor of their lives,
Till men no longer doubt?

JACQUES. Bewitched! Bewitched!
That's better—better still.
PIERRE. What ails thee, Jacques?
JACQUES. And nothing new. 'Twas talked of long ago.
PIERRE. Jacques! Jacques! what ails thee, man? Why knit thy brows?
Why now so grimly silent?
JACQUES. What if thou
Thyself, Pierre Bloui—thou, mine honest friend—
Wert an example and a living proof
That's pertinent to the question thou proposest?
PIERRE. Well—well!—
JACQUES. In passing judgment on themselves
The wisest err, and our oracular souls,
Self-questioned, answer, as the gods of old
Answered the world, in riddles.
PIERRE. Oh! have done—
Have done with this, and answer me. 'Tis thou—
Thou, Jacques! that talk'st in riddles. Answer me.
Am I bewitched? To fear an evil's worse
Than even to know, for certain. Answer me.
JACQUES. Thus earnestly adjured, I cannot less
Than answer frankly. Yes, Pierre! Thou art bewitched.
Yes. Thou art bewitched.
PIERRE. That's easily credible.

JACQUES. 'Tis proved beyond a doubt, my friend! 'Tis proved
No less by that pathetic history
Just poured by thee into our anxious ears,
Than by thy gait, thy bearing, thy dull eyes,
Where, as in chronicles of flesh and blood,
The same sad fact's confirmed.
PIERRE. And wherefore else
Should Manon shun me, flout me, hate me so,
Me, who dote on her—me, who'd die for her?
Unhappy that I am! Ah! woe is me—
Jacques! are such cases common?
JACQUES. Common enough.
Many and many in my time I've known.
And 'tis proverbial, men who otherwise
With natural gifts and graces overflowed,
Your cruel witches hate and persecute.
PIERRE. Unhappy me! Alas! But, Jacques, I pray thee,
How did their stories run?
JACQUES. Sad stories all—
Sad—sad—though various. With unnumbered spite
Were some tormented through their weary lives—
With disappointment, trouble, strife, and toil—
Beset by wayward chances and mishaps,
That turned the current of their best designs,
To grievous failure—stuck up as it were

As targets for misfortune—bruised and scourged
By persevering misery, till their minds
Grew cold and callous to the sense of woe,
And hope succumbed at last, and grim despair
Oppressed them like a nightmare—grappled with
By dangers from whose jaws they but escaped
With mortal rackings, leaving health or peace
Or happiness behind. And some were worn
By famine and disease—and some pursued
By dismal dreams and ghastly phantasies
Went howling mad—while others, as I've heard,
Were counted fools or idiots all their lives,
And by the common herd unjustly scorned,
Because a dull, bewildering dissonance
Perplexed the pith and centre of their brains
With never-ending jangle, and involved
Their thoughts in wild confusion——

PIERRE. Woe is me!

JACQUES. Thus came they—most of them—to cruel deaths
Or horrid transformations. Some were changed
To grinning apes that mocked and mowed at men,
Or chattered 'twixt their teeth a gibberish strange,
Thinking to move the pity of mankind,
Who did but laugh at them. Some in the shapes
Of vampires sucked the blood of those they loved.

Some parodied as owls to summer moons,
Made everlasting moan—but I must stop—
Not having leisure, Pierre! to tell thee more.

PIERRE. Was never cure for these afflictions found?

JACQUES. The Church was always lavish of her prayers,
And oft with counter charms and exorcisms
Has met the devil upon his battle ground
In man's distracted soul, and anxious priests,
And grave, compassionate monks, and weeping nuns,
Their breviaries have exhausted, and their knees
Worn out with genuflexions—martyrs' bones—
The teeth and ashes of distinguished saints,
And relics of renowned apostles—all—
Have all in turn been desperately applied—
Some scores of them at once—often, alas!—
Too often vainly—for, indeed, the worse,
And more inveterate the disease, the less
Was any chance of remedy, and 'tis said
That spells set working on us at our births
Are potent above all.

PIERRE. Assist me, Jacques!
Assist me with thy counsel. I'm undone.
Unhappy me!

JACQUES. It may be worse with thee
If what thou sufferest now be suffered long.

PIERRE. 'Tis certain, I'm undone. But what to do?
The blessed saints have pity on me! Jacques!
JACQUES. We must unearth thy devilish enemy—
Must find the witch who plagues thee.
PIERRE. How to find?
Or finding know her?
JACQUES. Hast thou no suspicion
To help thy search?
PIERRE. None. None. Heaven help me! None.
JACQUES. Yet here's a wolf of questionable fame
Has left this bleeding token in thy toils
In a most questionable manner.
PIERRE, Well.
JACQUES. I'll bet my life this creature and the witch
We seek are both the same.
PIERRE. Oh! yes. Thou'rt wise.
Who doubts it, Jacques? Thou'rt wise.
JACQUES. And thou suspectest
None whatsoever?
PIERRE. None.
JACQUES. Think.
PIERRE. Think!
JACQUES. Good Lord!

PIERRE. I cannot guess.

JACQUES. Plague take it! Is there none—
None, in these parts, no woman, young or old,
Whose dark, suspicious, and mysterious ways—
Her mode of life—her manners—her resorts—
Her more than human science and command
Of Nature's secrets, properties and powers—
Of times and seasons—of the starry spheres—
Of minerals, beasts, birds, fishes, and the like—
Encompass her with wonder, and her name
With black and devilish reputation brand?

PIERRE. I know none such.

JACQUES. Thou'rt dull this morning, Pierre!

PIERRE. I quite despair of finding her.

JACQUES. Again
Consider calmly. Hast thou seen of late
Françoise Thilouze?

PIERRE. I've not. But what of her?

JACQUES. Pierre! I suspect her.

PIERRE. What! This startles me.

JACQUES. It may well startle and amaze you, Pierre!
For afterwards who'll trust in woman's looks?

PIERRE. Yes. Yes. There was a rumour long ago
Of something of the sort. But at the time
I took no heed of it.

JACQUES. I saw her, Pierre!
This very morning.
PIERRE. Has she lost a hand?
JACQUES. She has.
PIERRE. The right?
JACQUES. The right it was.
PIERRE. Good Lord!
I never—never—had suspected her.
JACQUES. Regard her ways that are not as the ways
Of other maidens—how she'll sit for hours
Poring on books and musty manuscripts,
And charming out of black and crabbed texts,
Their secret sense, that like a timid soul,
Oppressed with dullness and deformity,
Will only to a kindred soul respond—
How 'mid the woods and fields she walks by night,
Indifferent to the season, all alone,
To con the names and order of the stars,
Or haply subjugate their shining hosts,
With magic forms and mystic utterances—
How by the dim light of the uncanny moon
She gathers herbs obscure and rare and strange,
On whose weird growth no daylight ever shone,
For doubtful uses—how she keeps at home
A horrid category of things abhorred—
Dried insects—spiders—reptiles—and the like—

Bleached bones and fragments of all monstrous forms
That walked the world—if ever they had life—
In ages long ago before the flood—
And petrified anatomies, and stones,
Sorted in awful and portentous rows,
And marked with cabalistic characters.

PIERRE. True—true—most true.

JACQUES. The eternal seasons seem
Obedient to her will. What time she sows
The willing Heavens descend upon her seeds.
Sun, wind, and rain, make favourites of her flowers.
The inevitable lightning passes by
And spares her in its wildest paroxysms
Of fitful fury. You remember how
Poor Marie Perrott walking in the woods
Beside her, on a sultry summer night,
Was by the sulphurous bolt struck dead—Françoise
Herself the while unharmed?

PIERRE. It happened so—
I well remember.

JACQUES. What are we to think
Of her cold, peevish, solitary life—
How in all village shows and ceremonies,
And social gatherings and festivities,
She takes no part, but with her aged sire,

From human joys and sympathy divorced,
Dwells in unamiable celibacy,
Shunning the love—the haunts—the gaze of men?

PIERRE. That young de Vardois loves her though, 'tis said.

JACQUES. Ah! There we touch on damning evidence
Which makes the case against her blacker still.
Is it credible so high and proud a youth
Would stoop to love her, had she not essayed
And practised on his heart with hellish charms
And devilish sorceries?

PIERRE. Such affinities
Are not in nature certainly. But why
Is Manon silent? Why does she not speak?
She's Françoise' cousin, and should know her best.
Come Manon! open those—those—pretty lips.

JACQUES. What! would'st thou have her testify against
Her flesh and blood? I dare be sworn she knows
More than we've ever dreamt of, and no doubt,
When duly called upon, will speak her mind.

PIERRE. Ah! Jacques! Some other sorceress let us find.
The name of Françoise by the poor is blest.
To me—to me—too—she's been ever kind.

JACQUES. For that she'd her own reasons. Where was shown
Her kindness in bewitching thee?

PIERRE. That's true.

JACQUES. How often, shuffler! have I heard thee tell
That story, how she tricked thee once at night
Thyself, and in the likeness of a wolf
Lured thee along for leagues to follow her—
And how thou'dst slain her too, but when the gun
Was to thy shoulder raised, thy finger on
The trigger, in a moment she resumed
Her natural shape.

PIERRE. Was that the story, Jacques?
I said not so, methinks.

JACQUES. What said'st thou then?

PIERRE. Why this—that being about to fire upon
A wolf I'd followed many a weary mile,
Françoise appeared before me suddenly,
And so the beast escaped. Though whence she came
Or how, I know not.

JACQUES. But the wolf escaped?

PIERRE. He seized his opportunity and fled.

JACQUES. Or on the spot by sudden glamour changed.
This story damns her, Manon, does it not?

MANON. Well. It looks ugly.

JACQUES. Gathering herbs no doubt!
PIERRE. She told me so.
JACQUES. You spoke with her, it seems.
PIERRE. She spoke but briefly, being in haste
away.
JACQUES. As well she might at such a place
and time.
And yet you're not convinced?
PIERRE. How many facts
Combine against her! Jacques! I'll go at once
To Michael's cottage.
JACQUES. Be not rash. What's worth
Thine observation, silently observe,
And straight return with all the speed thou canst.
PIERRE. What Manon, not one smile before
we part?
One smile—oh Manon!
JACQUES. Manon!
MANON. Would the fool
Before the enchantment's over have me change?
JACQUES. She's right. Oh! yes—'twere dead
against the rules
Of witchcraft, Pierre!
PIERRE. Good Lord! But if I'm shut
Out of her favour by these devilish spells,
Will my purgation cure her of disdain,
And that bright face of hers be kind as bright?
JACQUES. Answer him, girl!

MANON. Away with him!

JACQUES. Nay—nay.

MANON. What answer would he have?
Enough of this—
His folly's beyond bearing.

JACQUES. Go, my friend!
Go straight to what's in hand. First sow thy seed.
And look for thy reward in harvest time.

[*Exit Pierre.*

MANON. Poor wretch! The current of his muddy wits
Thy fables stir and thicken but the more.

JACQUES. Call them not fables, Manon! There's a truth
In all these legends. Nothing wholly false
Can cling a moment to the faith of man.
And even Pierre Bloui's human.

MANON. He's a fool.
That's clear. But take not others for the same.

JACQUES. Ah! girl, that's not true wisdom which aspires
To hold itself above the sovereign sway
Of mystery and of wonder.

MANON. Plague upon
This moralizing! Talk more to the point.
What's happened to my cousin? Answer, wretch!

JACQUES. That's truth I told to Bloui.
MANON. Truth! What's true?
JACQUES. That she's bewitched him.
MANON. Get thee gone!
JACQUES. The proofs
Are quite sufficient.
MANON. Proofs! Oh then thou meanest
To fasten on her with a public charge
And drag her to the stake?
JACQUES. It may be so.
MANON. That's dangerous. No. She must not—must not die.
I'll never be a party in a plot
That puts her life in any peril, Jacques!
JACQUES. There's nought to make the matter capital.
But quite enough to kill her in repute,
And turn her lover's stomach, and effect
Their separation.
MANON. Think you so indeed?
'Tis true love's test that danger to the loved
Still more inflames it. And will such a tale
As this obtain a hearing?
JACQUES. There are ears
Will greedily devour it.
MANON. Aye? What ears?
JACQUES. The Montmorencis and de Vardois will

Too gladly seize so palpable a means
Of making void this threatened marriage, which
To both their high and haughty families
Brings insult and disgrace. And after all
Who dares affirm thy cousin's not a witch!

MANON. Come. Mock me not. Thou talkest not to Pierre.

JACQUES. Hearts have been wrought upon in days of old
By amorous conjurations. Potent charms—
Warm influences circling in the air—
Rich philtres set in motion through the blood—
Have done their work before, and why not now?
Or is it that faith alone is capable
Of seeing, as of doing miracles?
Those wondrous powers—those awful agencies
Of mighty and malignant spirits coerced
From their dark kingdoms by man's mightier mind—
By his high science conquered and controlled
To do his mortal bidding—was not that
A grand and proud belief?—and if such things
Had once existence and reality,
And were not all delusion, can our doubts,
Which are but weakness—nay, can the utmost scope
Of shallow scorn or grovelling scepticism—
Their immaterial essence uncreate

Or in profound nonentity absorb
Their spiritual action and predominance?
And what's most credible, girl! that Nature should
Suffer a vital change and abdicate
Her sovereign functions, or that man debased
By self-indulgence and effeminacy,
Should in organic dissolution drown
His finer faculties of apprehension?
What signs—what marvels—in the unmeasured depths
Of all-enfolding silence may be done,
Yet we not know them! What mysterious life
Through our own spheres may spring and circulate—
What wondrous forces fluctuate round the world—
Yet not with faintest consciousness affect
Our cold perceptions! When the heart is blind,
Can these dim orbs—these bodily outward eyes—
Interpret Nature's secrets, or evolve
The meanings of the mystic universe?
Enslaved by matter, our encumbered sense
Reflects but mere appearance. Therefore all
That's strange, we tear asunder and degrade
To common causes—what we can't explain
We desperately reject. But penetrate

To whatsoever depths we dare, there's yet
Some mystery still we cannot analyse—
We cannot grasp—some god or devil at last
Lurks in the bosom of the wonderful.
No, Manon, no. Refuse not to believe,
What's merely marvellous—not impossible.

MANON. What means this long and wearisome harangue?
I never question but such things have been—
I never question but they still may be.
Yet Nature's sparing of events that break
The formal course of her recorded laws—
But, gracious Heaven! What's this? What's happened Pierre,
To paint his face so pale?

Enter PIERRE.

PIERRE. I've seen her—Hush!
She comes—

MANON. Ha!

Enter FRANÇOISE THILOUZE.

JACQUES. Stand back. Let the damsels talk.

MANON. Lord, save us! What's the matter with her arm?

FRAN. A trifle, dearest Manon!

MANON. Yet how pale
Thy face is, Françoise!

FRAN. I've o'ertaxed my strength
In walking hither. But what's wrong, my dear?
My visit seems not to be taken well.

MANON. Nay, cousin, enter. Sit. Be welcome. Sit.

FRAN. I'll sit with thee awhile beneath the porch.
For long I cannot tarry.

MANON. But the hurt!—
How was it done, and when?

FRAN. No matter, child!

MANON. Last night perhaps it happened?

FRAN. Aye. Last night.

JACQUES. You hear?

MANON. What! Is it a secret, then, Françoise?

FRAN. Yes. 'Tis a secret!

JACQUES. There!

MANON. Then I must know it.

FRAN. Not now, dear Manon. Question me not now.

JACQUES. No doubt she's right there.

MANON. What are we to think?
'Tis shocking. Why, this drives me to suspect
'Twas done in some dishonourable work—
Some tricks thou art ashamed of — Yes — by Heaven!

FRAN. Peace, Manon, peace. 'Tis not worth quarrelling over.
Say something of thyself. It grieves me, child!
To think what strangers we've become of late.
MANON. It grieves thee, does it? If report say true
The time's with thee sped cheerily enough,
And not been wasted quite in idleness.
FRAN. Dear Manon! we wax bitter. What's all this?
Has any traitor's tongue been here at work
To set a feud between us? Once we were
In our affection, sisters. Is it gone,
And all become a dream of yesterday?
MANON. If thou thy secrets, why not I have mine?
JACQUES. We must be careful, Manon, how we talk.
Françoise, 'tis said, will be a lady soon,
And well we know, the memory of old friends,
Amid those high aristocratic climes,
Is apt to grow both burdensome and cold.
FRAN. Old friends, God grant! I never may forget,
Whatever greatness fortune thrust upon me,
Whatever loss befal! But thou—what right
Hast thou to palter with that sacred name?
What friendship do I owe thee? Quite unasked

Thou'st tendered me thy love, which I refused.
What debt or obligation yet remains
Between us unfulfilled?

JACQUES. I bide my time.

MANON. But, cousin! was it friendly to conceal
Thy happiness from me?

FRAN. My happiness!

MANON. Mysterious still! Well. Well.

FRAN. One day thou'lt learn
How little happiness is mine to boast!

MANON. Be secret as thou wilt. 'Tis not my part
To probe thee further.

FRAN. Choose a fitting time.
Thou shalt be satisfied.

MANON. I'm satisfied.
I want no more excuses.

FRAN. Manon!

MANON. See,
Good Lord! Thine arm is bleeding.

FRAN. Let it bleed.
'Tis but an outward wound. The deadliest hurts
Are those within.

MANON. Nay. Bandage it afresh.
Come in. I'll wait upon thee.

FRAN. Never heed.
What! Is Pierre Bloui here? Oh, then, I see

How much I've trespassed upon precious time!
For my intrusion, pardon! Pierre! Approach.
Thy hand—may happiness attend you both!
Heaven bless you! Come. I take my leave at once.
My presence like an inauspicious star
Seems charged with trouble and perplexity.
I wish thee joy, dear Manon! Fare thee well!

[*Exit.*

JACQUES. How proudly from the perch whereon she has lit,
Propelled by windy fortune, she looks down,
Consoling thee with——Was not this indeed
The masterpiece of mockery—and of scorn?

MANON. We'll wrench her secret out of her.

JACQUES. For this
Would Manon have revenge?

MANON. I would and will.

JACQUES. The way lies open.

PIERRE. Once I thought to speak,
But ah! She looked so heavenly-innocent,
I could not—could not.

JACQUES. Aye—'tis thus she casts
Her devilish spells around thee. Rouse thyself.
We must delay no longer.

PIERRE. Well. What next?

JACQUES. We must accuse her.

PIERRE. What! The authorities?
JACQUES. Just so.
PIERRE. I've little fancy for the law.
'Tis like hot iron, too dangerous to be near.
Its lightest touch will bring away the skin.
Ill bodes the man who rashly meddles there!
JACQUES. Thou simpleton! 'tis not thy danger
—is it?
'Tis not upon the accuser, but the accused,
That prosecution falls—
PIERRE. The zeal—the zeal—
Of these religious gentry! When they find
That I'm bewitched, they'll purge me with a will.
JACQUES. Thou'lt not accuse her?
PIERRE. Can no other course
Be taken?
JACQUES. There. I've done with thee. Begone.
Henceforth drag on thy despicable days,
Too vile for pity, and beneath contempt.
PIERRE. Jacques! Jacques! Forsake me not.
JACQUES. Then follow me
This moment to the chateau. Montmorenci
Will gladly welcome us. And afterwards
We'll look for the police. This moment. Come.
[*Exeunt* JACQUES *and* PIERRE.

MANON. Go. For a cruel devil and hypocrite—
And sly cold blooded traitor. Go. Thy looks
Curdle the creeping blood—thy harpy lips

Breathe deadly vapour, fatal to the soul.
But with ten thousand devils and hypocrites
I'll join—for friends and coadjutors take
The general mass of hell—before I'll bend
To her high reaching pride. Shall I endure
To see her play the lady over me?
See her with that cold prudishness of hers—
Those mincing airs of mock humility—
That simpering condescension swim about,
And make parade of her indifference, just
As if to say "I care not—oh—not I"—
I'll never—never—bear it—Wonderful
How much ambition's hid in modesty!
Who—who'd have thought she'd play so deep a game
With her meek looks? While I poor driveller
Who to my conscious heart confessed a hope
Of lofty fortune—I forsooth! must tread
In the worn tracks and wake of her contempt,
And with her hinds be mated. And to think
That he should love her—he—of all men—he—
Oh! madness—madness!—No. My brain's still firm.
The weak—the weak alone take refuge there.
The strong make instruments of all events,
Create their own occasions, and compel
Necessity itself to be their slave.
Yes. I'll pursue this vision of my hate

Even to the gates of hell. Go, Jacques! to work.
I'll second thee, whatever be thy plans,
And shrink from nothing now by thee proposed.

ACT III.

The Trial.

Hall hung with black, and dimly lighted. Upon one side a table, with black cover. Upon it books and writing apparatus. Secretaries and assistant clerks thereat. Beyond table, elevated platform, whereon sit ecclesiastical commissioners, legal functionaries, Marquis de Montmorenci, Count de Vardois, *other nobles and gentry. Opposite side of table facing Court,* Françoise Thilouze *standing, in black dress, her right arm bandaged. Gens d'armes, officers, monks and other ecclesiastics. Constant movement of persons in and out.*

1st Com. Is the Court ready—all in order set?
Secretary. We only wait upon your Eminences.
2nd Com. Before the Prefect she was brought, it seems.
Was her examination noted down?
Sec. She would not answer—was refractory
And contumacious—She defied the law.

So thereupon the Prefect judged it right,
For better discipline and expedition,
At once to hand her over to the Church.
3RD COM. A prudent prefect.
1ST COM. Fathers! What were best?
First search the prisoner's body, or begin
With taking evidence?
2ND COM. I suppose in this
We've some discretion, and my judgment is
The formal process should precede the search,
And of what follows the foundation lay.
3RD COM. I think the same.
1ST COM. Well then, at once begin
The process of arraignment, Secretary!
SEC. Françoise Thilouze, daughter of Michael, whose
Surname thou bearest, peasant in estate,
Physician by profession, thou'rt arraigned,
Before this Court, indicted and accused,
For hellish witchcraft, and diablerie—
That to the peril of thine immortal soul
Thou hast oft the sacred silence of the night
Profaned with rites unholy and abhorred—
From stones and herbs and reptile shapes hast culled
Infernal virtues, made the sunbeams yield
Collusive magic, drained from dews and frosts,
And hail and snow strange powers—from moon, and stars,

And clouds, drawn down their mystic influences—
Hast with the wicked spirits and herd of hell
In impious league and horrid compact joined—
Of fiends and devils hast thy familiars made—
Thy friends and coadjutors—conquering them
To thine abominable and unclean behests
With rhymes and spells and cabalistic signs,
And written charms, and verbal formularies—
Hast in Satanical transformations dealt,
And chartered brutal shapes—especially hast
In very form and fashion of a wolf
Thy divine soul degraded and abused—
Hast in that form and fashion oftentimes
With bestial exploration ranged about
The woods by night and day, but mostly night,
And made thy transformations manifest
To many eyes, but in particular
To one Pierre Bloui, and one Jacques Reynard—
Hast further foully practised on the sense
Of said Pierre Bloui, and his wits bewitched,
And with thy devilish sorcery made him mad—
And worst of all, by like unnatural means
Has practised on and fatally beguiled
The credulous heart of Victor, son and heir
Of Count de Vardois, and ensnared his soul,
And lured his facile and unwary youth,
To pour extravagant and pernicious vows,
And promise monstrous marriage. Answer now,

Françoise Thilouze! these charges—are they true
Or false?—I bid thee answer—yes or no.
Guilty or not, I call on thee—declare.

FRAN. Oh! noble, reverend, holy sirs! I pray you,
That in this strait I may not be denied
What strength or comfort I might hope to find
From presence and advice of loving friends.
No wonder, bowed beneath this heavy woe—
By this strange, sudden, cruel fate oppressed—
A poor, weak, ignorant, helpless, lonely maid
Should falter with unutterable fears
And own herself a coward?

SEC. But answer first—
Guilty or not—the charges true or false?

FRAN. Why must I answer?

1ST COM. Girl! what words are these?
Hast thou no sense of thy position here,
Or dost not know thy danger?

2ND COM. Stay!—'tis fit
We should inform thee, maiden! the due course
Of righteous judgment and investigation,
Whose soul, and end, and summary, are no more
Than justice, must be clothed in fitting forms—
Must in convenient order be designed—
Must take some bodily outcome—else it were
A bottomless void, swallowing up time and words—

A wild, unregulated chaos mixed,
Of fulsome repetitions, foolish facts,
And inarticulate murmurs, and mad sounds.
Know, then, 'tis needful thy defence should tread
In beaten tracks—thine answers tally with
The questions framed by due authority.
And to this end thine answer we require—
Guilty or not—the charges true or false?

FRAN. Ye tell me justice is your only aim—
The summary, end, and soul of what ye do.
I know it should be so, and ye are wise,
And learned—the keepers of recorded truth—
Arrayed and charactered in holiness.
I know besides that God's for ever just—
And that he's written his eternal truths
In every human soul—to none denied
Some glimmering consciousness—some feeble sense—
Of that high music and celestial light,
Which are the speech and atmosphere of Heaven.
Yes. In your bosoms there's a voice divine,
Which, if ye hear and follow, then I'm safe,
For then to you shall justice be supreme,
Holy, and awful, and inviolable.
Then your decrees must blend and harmonize,
With the oracles of God—must breathe his breath—

Must take the tone of his Almighty mind.
Nor will they want authority, nor need
These gloomy forms—this black emblazonment—
This pageantry that mocks the state of death—
This darkness like the shadow of death itself—
To give them sacredness and estimation.
I ask you then for justice—justice only.
But surely to that end 'tis not unfit
I should have friendly counsel to direct
On this hard path—untrodden and untried—
My tender sex—my inexperienced years.

1ST COM. Girl! thy request we cannot entertain.

2ND COM. 'Tis quite irregular—there's no precedent
To justify so dangerous a proceeding—
So inconvenient—so unseasonable.

3RD COM. It may be thought of at some future time.

FRAN. Irregular! Dangerous! Inconvenient! —Ah!
When I was seized this very night, unwarned—
With sudden violence in the dead of night—
When all the world were sleeping in their beds—
With cruel violence and indecent haste—
By ruffian hands—by coarse, unmanly men—
If men they were whose hideous faces mocked—

Whose language shamed—the sense of womanhood—
Torn rudely from my father's aged arms,
And dragged with every circumstance of scorn
And insult—both of my accuser's name,
And how I had offended uninformed—
To answer for my life before this Court—
This secret Court, that in appropriate gloom
And horror shrouded sits—shall I be told
These things were regular? Nay, when on the seat
Of sacred judgment—on the very bench
Of Justice, with my judges, side by side,
Men take their places, whom I know too well
For enemies powerful and relentless, who,
For some base purpose of their own, have sworn
That I must perish—who, like tigers, thirst
For mine—my innocent blood—for such it is—
Who glare upon me with ferocious eyes,
And slay me and devour me with their looks—
Is this all regular—all within the law?
The law!—Alas!—Its subtle intricacies
Who knows, save those that by the knowledge live
And prey upon mankind!—Those sullen shades—
Those dull and gloomy labyrinths who shall dare
Explore? To uninitiated eyes
They seem a wilderness o'ergrown with weeds,

Where blight and mould and mildewy rottenness
Ferment and fester—where the serpent broods
Of fraud and error fatten and infest—
But where the light of Heaven falls sad and cold,
Dissolved to livid mists, and Justice dies
Choked in the crude malarious atmosphere.

1ST COM. Her speech already smacks of heresy—
'Tis by the holy canons, girl! thou'rt judged,
Not by profane and secular laws of men.

FRAN. By what particular canon of the Church
Is my old father severed from his child?
What holy law forbids my intercourse
With all who love me—relatives or friends?
Or are your canons as the voice of God—
Sufficient for themselves—without support
From written or unwritten laws of Heaven?

2ND COM. This must not be. Be silent, prisoner, else
We must keep order with a heavy hand.

FRAN. Aye, gag me—gag me. Why should not the talk
Even as the power be all upon one side?

3RD COM. We hoped thou would'st have sued to us for grace—
We looked to find thee frighted and ashamed
Of thine offences—penitent—humble—sad—
We would be tender—would be merciful—

But mercy in despair must veil her face
From stubborn pride and brazen contumacy.
FRAN. I look to God for mercy—God alone.
From you, who are only human after all,
I challenge human justice, such as it is.
And therefore in the name of God above,
And in the king's name, and the law that flows,
Or should flow, both from God and from the king—
However feebly, I protest against
Your acts as wrong, and lawless, and unjust.
1ST COM. What's this but heresy?
2ND COM. Nay—at any rate
'Tis insolence. And surely we do wrong,
Suffering her thus to trespass and infringe
Beyond all form and shadow of respect,
With her licentious answers.
3RD COM. Girl! Repent!
'Tis the last chance that we dare offer thee,
If not of life, at least of speedy death,
Without the tortures that must otherwise
Accompany thy perverse and shameless end.
FRAN. Repent! Is that your justice? What! Before
My guilt's examined or your charges proved!
SEC. Oh! yes. Confess thy guilt—confess the charge.

Implore the mercy of the Court betimes.
'Twill profit thee alike in earth and heaven.

FRAN. How shall it profit to destroy my soul?
Have ye forgotten there's a God above
That sits in judgment upon perjury
And scourges falsehood? Ye that are or seem
To human eyes his chartered ministers—
His vicars upon earth—is this—is this—
Your holy teaching—this your Gospel truth?
This—when I stand in danger of my life,
To save it by a lie? Alas! Alas!
I feel myself so near the brink of death,
That even if I were minded to be false,
I dare not utter aught save what is true—
I dare not lie—too certain if I dare
That lie, hung like a millstone round my neck,
Would sink me deeper than death's lowest depths,
Down the dark chasm and dreadful pit of Hell.

1ST COM. Enough. Her folly shuts the gate of grace.

FRAN. Not grace—not grace—but justice I demand.

2ND COM. Thou shalt have justice rest assured of that.

FRAN. What that assurance means I know too well.

3ED COM. Her conscience, like an oracle, fore-
ordains,
And her own lips prognosticate her doom!
FRAN. Who sees not that my doom was fore-
ordained?
Condemned before I was accused or tried,
And sentenced even before I was condemned—
Who sees not there, upon that reverend bench,
The portents of premeditated wrong—
The obtuse presumption of deliberate might—
The deafness of inexorable power—
The legal murder ye've conspired to do.
'Tis graven on your cold and stony hearts—
It glares from your insatiate cruel eyes—
It points your utterance with predestined death.
Why should I plead? Why longer lend my-
self
To this high mockery—this momentous farce?
'Tis quite impossible any plea of mine
Can touch or find a corner in your hearts.
Then do your wills—your reverend—holy wills.
In expectation of the worst I'm armed.
I'll make no weak submission while alive,
Nor vainly sue, nor impotently strive,
But on God's mercy—God's omniscience rest,
And call on him my innocence to attest.
DE VARD. Thank God! Her summons God
will not attend.

MONT. With what a rampant and rebellious spirit
The girl's possessed. Sure Lucifer himself
Must her chief agent and familiar be.

SEC. Accused! we wait some answer more in form.

FRAN. Set down that answer—will not that suffice?
Or do ye tremble at the name of God,
And fear to write it in your books? But how
If I've no other answer?—And I have not.
Again I say, I'll not of my own will
Be actor in your dull and bloody farce.

1ST COM. Methinks we've waited on her long enough.

2ND COM. The business may proceed.

3RD COM. And now for proofs.
Call in your witnesses.

SEC. Manon Thierry.

Enter MANON THIERRY.

FRAN. Ah! Hidest thou thy face, unhappy child!
'Tis well thou dost. It shows some nature left—
Some struggling fibre of uprooted faith
That through the desolation of thy soul,
Scorched by the burning drought of passion, lives
A feeble life, again to be revived

By the sweet freshening of autumnal tears,
To late repentance. How I pity thee,
Misguided Manon! and forgive thee too!

SEC. Manon Thierry! Answer to thy name,
And lift thine eyes, and set them on the face
Of yonder damsel, here with sorcery charged.
What knowest thou of her, bearing on this charge?

MANON. Directly nothing—indirectly much.

SEC. She's someway thy relation—is she not?

MANON. First cousin—daughter of an uncle.

SEC. You
Lived much together?

MANON. Yes. From infancy
Companions—playmates—friends—

FRAN. Yes. Put it down.
'Twill show what friendship comes to—what it means—
With Christian men and women.

DE VARD. And with girls.

SEC. Proceed, and what thou knowest of her attest.

MANON. My lords! I know her, yet I know her not.
We lived so much together, yet apart—
Like sisters in communion—not in kind.
Up to this moment, a secluded life—
A wayward—strange—unnatural—moody life
She has led, but whether from reserve, or fear,

Or peevishness, or pride, I cannot tell.
From human fellowship she dwells apart,
The sovereign of a solitary world.
Neither to friendship, nor to love, she leans.
Myself except—and I'm her relative—
Of her own sex she never had a friend.
And men's regards she put away from her,
As one might put away a forward child,
With more disdain than anger, and methinks,
Also with more indifference than disdain.

SEC. But young de Vardois loves her, does he not?

MANON. 'Tis said so, but how truly I know not.

SEC. Her father's cottage does he not frequent
And her society very much affect?

MANON. He comes and goes as noble youths are wont,
Where peasant maidens dwell, to come and go.

SEC. But men for nothing never come and go.
Did young de Vardois never talk of love
Or offer it, or make it, to the accused?

MANON. When noble youths and maidens talk of love
They talk of it apart from other ears.

SEC. But did she never to thine ears confess
De Vardois loved her?

MANON. Never.

SEC. Has she not

Practised upon his heart by cunning ways—
By spells and charms and sorcery and the like ?

MANON. Not with my cognizance or complicity.

SEC. What hast thou more of her dark ways to tell ?

MANON. How strange her ways are I've already said.

The world in which we live—this common world,
The world of men and women is not hers.
She lives beyond it a fantastic life—
Her pleasures and her tastes eschew mankind.
With her own thoughts, and fantasies, and dreams,
In dark domains of Art—in silent shrines
Of abstruse science—in mysterious realms
Of knowledge—in the world that's out of doors—
In fields and forests—with the sun and moon
And stars—with all the dumb intelligence
Of Nature—and it may be something more,
That's not in Nature, her communion lies.
She wins companions from the mystic past,
And talks with ghosts of the unforgotten dead,
And draws their awful voices from the lore
Of ancient days, from hard and crabbed texts,
From wrinkled parchments, musty manuscripts,
From pictures and from books—she's deeply versed
In Nature's laws, and causes, and effects—
In the elemental phases, and the flight

Of times and seasons, and the eternal dance
Of motion, revolution, and repose,
The various aspects and Protean shapes
Of migratory matter. She can tell
What the winds whisper with their mildest breath,
And what they roar in tempests. On the clouds
She traces what the yellow lightnings scrawl,
And what the thunder threatens understands.
She knows the meaning of the heavenly lights—
Can read their course and motion, and divine
The mystery and immensity of Night.
She's learned in alchemy—the mineral powers—
The functions of this globe's component crust—
The affinities, virtues, correspondencies,
And properties of metals, earths, and stones—
The laws of composition and cohesion—
Of substance and fluidity—all these
She has pressed into her service and has taught
To obey her nice analysis—she can bring
The irregular forms, and rough varieties,
And masses crude of the inorganic world
To settle into shape, and range themselves
In friendly groups, ready at her command,
Again to separate, and again combine.
And at her voice will hostile forces blend,
Antagonistic elements coalesce,
And crystals flame before her in the dark.
Of plants and animals she makes bosom friends

And gives them all her interest—all her love—
To which with dumb devotion they respond.
She wins their instincts and their sympathies.
She learns by heart their natures and their names—
Their kinds—their structures—their anatomies—
Their haunts—their homes—their habits—and their ways.
The cruelest and most timid beasts alike
Crouch at her feet, and feed out of her hands,
And flowers will seem to brighten at her touch
And comprehend her presence. She can work
Such miracles and wonders as are told
Alike of saints and devils, and belong
To glorious legends of an olden time,
Which like bright coronals upon baby brows
Wreathe the young world's romantic history.
But pardon me—to tell you all she knows,
Or all her art includes or can achieve,
Would take up hours, and still when all was told,
Which I could tell, or fancied I could tell,
I had still forgotten more than I had told.

SEC. In brief, her knowledge is unholy, and
Unholily acquired.

MANON. Nor less nor more
I mean, than has thy briefer phrase expressed.

FRAN. Oh Manon! Manon! oh!

SEC. But can'st thou not

Report some special and particular act
To prove her guilt, and stamp it into fact?
MANON. I'm not her agent or confederate, sir!
SEC. She has a living father, has she not?
MANON. Michael Thilouze—
SEC. The same that by repute
Is alchemist, or chemist?
MANON. Well. He's spent
And wasted many a year of his long life
In barren science.
SEC. Had he then—thou sayest—
No part—nor parcel—nor complicity—
In her dark doings?
MANON. Oh! I'm certain—none.
None knowing him would deem it probable.
He's a poor, simple, innocent, meek, old man,
The tranquil current of whose harmless days
Flows feebly in contented poverty
And modest unobservance. Though he taught
His daughter what he knows, which is not much,
He disapproves of her extravagancies,
And often have I heard him, with a sigh,
Confess, how far beyond his teaching now
She'd gone, as it were alone, for many a year.
SEC. Did no familiar on her steps attend—
No beast—no ghostly or no guardian shape,

Such as the fiends are wont to simulate,
What time they vex our earthly atmosphere
With their unholy presence?

MANON. One at least
There was—one creature of suspicious sort—
Scarce ever absent from his mistress' side—
A large black cat—the marvel of his kind,
For size, strength, beauty, and sagacity.

1ST COM. He should have been secured.

2ND COM. Why seized ye not
This creature with the girl?

3RD COM. Why not, indeed?

OFFICER. We saw him not, so please your eminences.

MANON. His disappearance with her capture was
In point of time exactly parallel.

MONT. A notable escape.

DE VARD. Methinks this cat
Should formally be judged for contumacy.

FRAN. Not many days, Manon. Not many days
Ere through thy heart a late—too late remorse,
For what thou dost this moment, or hast done,
Shall strike with sharp but unavailing pangs.
Then will it much affect thy peace of mind
To know that I forgive thee, which indeed
From the very bottom of my heart I do.

God grant in mercy, by thyself and Him,
Thou mayst that hour as freely be forgiven.
SEC. Call Jacques Reynard.
MANON. First, by your graces' leave,
I'll venture to beseech you on behalf
Of her I've testified against. She's young,
And though not guiltless, yet her sins are green—
Not deeply rooted are they in the soil
Of a hard nature, hardened more by years.
Oh! let me hope you'll still consider this—
That mercy 'll be your ruling motive here—
That your stern justice may not crop away
Her flower of life, but rather give her time
To plant repentance in her contrite soul,
And soften Heaven with penitential tears.
FRAN. Plead not for me. I would not earn my life,
Nor owe my pardon, Manon! to thy prayers.
Where Judgment sits, Truth only should avail.
With righteous Judgment Truth goes hand in hand,
And Innocence with intuitive suasion speaks.
But from this high and holy Court—before
This reverend Presence—like a bride divorced,
Is Truth cast out, and Innocence stricken dumb.
Their ears for damning accusations thirst,
Being deaf to mercy. Ah! believest thou
Such judges as thou seest above us there,

Will carefully consider or regard
Such trivialities as mere sex and age?
1ST COM. We may not listen, maiden, to thy prayers,
Or take account of such petition now.
2ND COM. We waste our time. Another witness call.
3RD COM. Another's here.
SEC. This woman stands arraigned
For witchcraft. Look upon her and disclose
If aught thou knowest thereto that's pertinent.
JACQUES. What I know truly, truly I'll unfold.
For God and all my guardian saints forfend
That I should trifle with the oath I take,
Or draw damnation down upon my soul
By perjury, deadliest of all deadly sins.
To lie 'twixt man and man is mean and base,
To lie to Heaven is mad—but thus to lie
Deliberately to fling our falsehood up
Into God's face, and with concocted fraud
Affront Omniscience—that's insanity,
And insolence, and impiety, all in one.
Oh! of such barefaced daring but to dream
Should paralyze the functions of the brain,
And strike one cold with sudden epilepsy—
I crave the kind indulgence of the Court
For this digression—Well. 'Twas six months since,

Upon a night in March—the last but four—
The twenty-seventh of March—the very night
Of that wild uproar of unruly winds—
And mutiny of mistempered elements—
No doubt all present recollect it well—
Which in one hour with sudden blight defaced
The forward flush and beauty of the spring,
And spoiled the young woodlands of their early
charms,
Leaving unfoliaged the poor skeleton boughs
As if from ambush on the unwary year,
A second winter bursting out apace,
With force of arms and violence, had usurped
The season's sovereignty. What a time it was!
What toil—what pains—it cost us to remove
The woody ruins from our choked-up ways,
Where still in monumental heaps they stand,
By the road-side, and take the traveller's eye,
Even as we left them piled. That very night
Was I returning from the village home,
At fall of dusk—my way was lone and drear—
And anxiously I marked the mustering signs
Of airy mischief—how the encumbered moon—
Long since deserted by the treacherous stars,
Her pale auxiliaries, who in coward flight,
Had dropped off one by one—how still she strove
Against disastrous fortune, but at length
Perplexed and sad, like one that in despair,

With hostile numbers struggling, proudly yields
The unequal combat, gradually submerged,
Sank in the gathering blackness of the West—
And how the pitiless, insatiate clouds,
Like conquering squadrons trailing on her flight,
Her failing efforts with fresh hosts besieged,
And shut her up in gloom. The darkness grew.
I felt the passing nightbird's heavy wings
Flap by my ears with thick and cloudy sound,
And fitful moanings floated through the air,
And low premonitory whispers crept
Among the restless leaves, and every while
A gush of windy clamour would arise,
Poured like a sigh from earth's o'erladen breast,
Whereof the abrupt cessation left behind
Silence more awful, terror more profound.
Dark—Dark!—The sense of utter solitude
Oppressed me, and my feeble steps began
To falter with fatigue—my wildered eyes
To glare with troubled inquisition round.
My track was lost. I knew not where I trod.
Judge then with what an agony of joy
I saw before me in the solid dark
A light gush up. Far off!—far off it seemed
Like some dim meteor shining from the shore
Of a mysterious world, but not the less,
Believe me, welcome. Then with heavy steps,
Through briar and copse, and bristling underwood,

Through dripping boughs that plashed across my face,
Soaked with the first drops of the sputtering skies,
I tore my way—climbing the slippery trunks
Of fallen pines, that ages long ago
Had in their fall ploughed furrows in the soil,
Where now they rotted—wading through the beds
Of ancient streams whose shrunken currents crept
With hidden murmurs through the o'ertopping reeds,
That trembled to their touch—with many a fall
Plunging through cavernous indentations scooped
In soft and oozy mould, for many a year
Enriched by bounteous autumns, and whereon
Time out of mind the thick untrodden moss
Had spread its clammy carpet, intermixed
With the rank toadstool and the feathery fern.
At length with toilsome effort I'd approached
The spot I sought—an opening in the wood—
This room might be the measure of its size—
A little grassy circle made—as it were—
By man's art clear and level. But alas!
No mortal hands had fashioned it—no spade
Its bloom of virgin earth had ever turned—
No axe had shorn its native woods away.
Above it climbed a clogging atmosphere

Of sulphurous fog, and ever in the midst
A pale blue flame sprang pointed from the ground,
Shedding its ghastly lustre o'er a scene,
Was never matched for horror. On the turf
Reclined a ghastly shape, by devilish art,
Of wax, or some such substance, tricked with life.
Its hollow eyes, whose dislocated orbs
Shot forth a lurid glare—its face with pain
Distorted and convulsed—so well expressed
The extreme of mortal suffering, as might win
Compassion from a fiend. Its open breast
One bloody cavity, without a heart—
Whence had the heart been wrenched away—it seemed
Fresh torn out by the roots. Who doubts my heart
Should sicken at the sight? I could not choose
But shudder at those simulated pangs,
Such perfect life did the apparition bear,
So human showed its sense of agony.
The purple clots—the swollen and festering flesh—
The lacerated masses red and raw—
I saw them creep and quiver—

SEC. Did the shape
Resemble any one thou knowest?

JACQUES. It did.
Of one that I know well, and knowing, love,

And hold in honour, and deserved respect,
The copy was exact. I speak in fear,
And tremble to pronounce that noble name.
But truth must out, whatever be the risk.
Victor de Vardois!—May the Lord above
Protect his precious life!

SEC. Amen!

OTHERS. Amen!

SEC. Proceed.

JACQUES. Nor this alone of living things
I saw. Beside him was a huge she-wolf,
That ever as if with passionate industry
And growl of brutal appetite devoured
A bleeding human heart, or what to me
Its perfect type and natural image seemed.

SEC. What didst thou then? What thereupon ensued?

JACQUES. Long—long I stood—too long irresolute,
Rapt in the dull idealess ecstasy
Of silent wonder—then as if from sleep
Upstarting in a spasm of sudden fear
I snatched a branch that rotted at my feet,
And hurled it at the monster—in a trice
The ghostly pageant was dissolved, and I
Once more alone with darkness and the storm.
I caught a sound of footsteps pattering past—
A sense of human presence through me thrilled—

The sweep of female draperies—and a form
That brushed across my vision in the gloom—
Then all was gone. But wonderful the change—
What sudden metamorphosis had touched
The woods around me! They no longer wore
Their strange weird aspect. They were strange no more,
Nor I bewildered. I could now discern
Their thin and threadbare outskirts on the grey
Background of heaven—the fretted tracery
Of leaves and branches in the widening light,
And lower level of the horizon's verge—
Could notice where the new took settled shape,
Or mixed with, and encroached upon the old.
Beneath my feet, slow gliding, I could feel
Indented footprints—tracks of man and beast—
Long grooves cut in the ground by graving wheels
Of carts and waggons, passing to and fro.
I strode through scattered limbs—a mass confused—
Of trees, which human hands had toppled down,
And strewed about in indiscriminate fall—
Whose shattered spoils encumbered where they fell.
I stumbled o'er their levelled carcases,
Fresh fallen and sappy with their latest spring,
Or feathery with the moss of mourning years.
I rubbed against their flayed and barkless sides.

I touched with passing hand their flat-hewn trunks,
The work of iron teeth and edges—gnawed
And notched with axe and saw. From everywhere
Breathed human presence—human neighbourhood—
Till my heart leaped to their familiar signs.
And so my way was open. Still the storm
Delayed to fall, and held itself aloof,
Threatening above me, as an eagle spreads
His cloudy wings, and poises ere he swoops.
Thus I'd free leisure to escape, and soon
By my own humble roof was safely screened.

SEC. Did after-search discover nothing more?

JACQUES. Nothing, indeed.

SEC. And diligent search was made?

JACQUES. Over and over again, for I myself
By day and night have searched the forest through—
Its haunts, familiar to my boyish days,
With restless hot persistency explored—
But never since mine eyes have lighted on
The scene of that night's bloody pageantries—
The spot I then beheld by horrid rites,
And tricks of monstrous devilry defiled.

1ST COM. This is a fearful instance and a sad,
How little are the strongest safe, when thus
Hell's wicked agents work!

2ND COM. Call up again
Manon Thierry.
3RD COM. There, in Court, she waits.
A LORD. Your son was much in danger, it appears.
DE VARD. Yes. By this tale his errors are excused,
What skill could parry such a devilish thrust!
MONT. The devil knows best whom best to practise on.
There are who welcome him with open arms,
And headlong rush on hell.
SEC. The Court would learn
Where was the girl Thilouze upon the night
Described by Reynard, March the twenty-seventh?
MANON. I mind it well. A dreadful night it was.
Her father's cottage I for shelter sought.
But she, being absent, we with anxious eyes,
Besieged the doorway, waiting her return.
And in the thick and middle of the storm,
When the racked sluices of dishevelled clouds
From their black reservoirs poured oceans down—
When peal on peal the thickset thunder crashed
Straight o'er our heads in dire continuous din—
The while the maddest winds that ever made
Rebellious blazon betwixt earth and heaven

Scoured past, careering through the wet-black waste,
As if in the horrible uproar they rejoiced,
Which they made still more horrible—she came
In piteous plight, dishevelled — drooping — drenched—
So pale and so forlorn, she might have passed
For a storm spirit, or dim night-wandering ghost.

SEC. Ye questioned her, no doubt?

MANON. Of course we did.
And got for answer brief—she missed her way—
The darkness overtook her, gathering flowers,
And in the storm she grew bewildered more.

DE VARD. Seems then against a drenching thunder-storm
Art magic is not proof.

MONT. How! Knowest thou not
No extra service—not a jot beyond
Their actual contract will the fiends perform?

SEC. Pierre Bloui! Bring him hither.

Enter PIERRE BLOUI, *a wolf's paw in his hand, and between two Monks with crucifixes.*

SEC. Fellow! state
What is the substance of thy charge against
This woman, at thine instance here arraigned.

PIERRE. Oh noble sirs! have pity—Heaven above,

Have pity on me! Masters! ye behold
A wretch upon whose birth misfortune set
Her cruel seal, and since with heavy hand
Hath overborne—whom every form of ill—
All shapes and engines of extremity—
All monstrous powers and devilish influences—
Calamitous currents, and malignant stars—
Have aye conspired to plague and persecute—

SEC. Speak to the point. Eschew prolixity.
Dost thou suspect this woman for a witch,
Or know her?

PIERRE. I suspect and know her too.

SEC. Believ'st thou that by black unhallowed means—
By necromantic art—by devilish spells—
By charms — by sorceries — or the like — she brought
This current of mischance upon thy head?

PIERRE. 'Tis my belief.

SEC. And wherefore? On what grounds?
Thine answer—quick.

1ST COM. The fellow's all abroad.

JACQUES. Go on. What hinders thee? Collect thy wits,
If wits thou hast. Remember — the she-wolf—
The moonlight—and the sorry trick she played.

PIERRE. I must begin at the beginning, else

I grow confused, and cannot testify
What I know best.
2ND COM. Let him deliver himself
In his own fashion of whate'er he lists,
'Twill expedite the business.
3RD COM. Be assured
There's none can hurt thee, if thy story tend
To do religion service.
PIERRE. Give me time
To think—'twas once—'twas once upon a time—
DE VARD. A learned exordium.
MONT. Interrupt him not.
PIERRE. The deep black mantle of the night was lined
With white effulgence of the summer moon.
Intent on sport, I sauntered through the woods,
Which lay, like an enchanted city, bathed
In silver sleep. So fair around me spread
The still night picture. In the luminous lines—
The long panoramas by the moonlight made—
Broad dusky shadows crossed by brilliant gleams—
I fancied streets, and avenues, and lanes,
Shut in with strange fantastic edifices—
Begirt with temples, palaces, and towers,
In all their architectural imagery
And multitudinous ornament arrayed—
A wilderness of spires and pinnacles,
And porticoes and arches, painted thick,

And flushed together in sublime excess,
And bright extravagance, and bewildering waste.
And over all the great Night looking down,
Festooned with fire-dust from the waste of worlds
Like gems flung o'er a bride in wilful sport
And recklessness of love—the shivering dance
Of dewy leaves, lit up by moon and stars,
Like lanterns at some fairy festival—
The solemn stillness—the pervading gloom—
That was not light or darkness, but was both
Darkness and light mixed married and made one—
The strange bewildering glimmer that belongs
To moonlight only—shed a wondrous charm
Of supernatural beauty. I began
To walk like one bewitched. My foolish pulse
From one extreme to the other rose and fell,
But came in the end to beat delirious time,
And chime, as it were, with some mysterious force,
Which like a shadow from another life,
From outward Nature emanating, flowed
And covered all, within me and around,
Till all my several senses were absorbed,
And individual being merged and lost
In that dim, dreamy, dread, immensity—

DE VARD. A right sententious peasant this appears.

MONT. Why halts the fellow? Curse him for a fool!

DE VARD. Run out like an hour glass. Turn him upside down.

MONT. I would I were beside him with a thong.

DE VARD. Nay. Prompt him. He's at fault. He's lost the cue.

MONT. De Vardois' jests for ever are ill-timed.

2ND LORD. The story's not his own, I'm much afraid.

MONT. The same he's often to his fellows told.

2ND LORD. But he recites it here, as if from book.

DE VARD. He should recite it better, in that case.

MONT. He may forget what happened long ago.

2ND LORD. His face fits ill with phrases so refined.

MONT. Hush! hush! dear friends! We interrupt the Court.

1ST COM. Proceed. We make slow progress all this while.

2ND COM. Nay, give him time. He needs be more composed.

3RD COM. He's nervous and confused. His memory fails.

1ST LORD. He looks an honest fellow, nevertheless.

2ND LORD. For me, I put no credence in his tale.

1ST LORD. Wrong in particulars—right upon the whole.

MONT. My noble friends! Be careful what you say.

DE VARD. The joint was his—the dish another dressed.

MONT. When will de Vardois learn to be discreet?

DE VARD. I'm weary of their crisp, cold-blooded, cant.

MONT. What! Art thou minded to endanger all?

DE VARD. Howe'er ill played, your play will end the same.

JACQUES. Now fool! What ails thee? Art thou deaf and dumb?

SEC. Proceed, but closer to the matter keep.
The simple truth suffices. Not the place
For flights or fancies this.

PIERRE. They were not flights,
Nor were they fancies. Then was I bewitched—
That time some glamour o'er my senses fell.
Then on my soul this devilish shadow stole,
And ever since, encumbered by its spell,

I've walked environed with a waking dream.
But something stirring—something that drew
near,
And made scarce audible rustle in the dark—
Aroused me. Turning, I beheld, erect
Upon a white mound, which the moonlight chose
To rest itself upon, and painted bright,
A huge she-wolf—her bushy tail upturned
Fell backward o'er her loins—her lifted nose
Snuffing the silver air. With cautious tread
And constant pause, from shade to shade I crept,
And soon in trembling breathlessness stood near,
Holding the iron instrument of doom
Well poised, my finger on the trigger just
Upon the point of off. But in a trice,
Before I touched the trigger—she was gone—
Gone like a phantom—gone without a sound—
Before mine eyes by sudden glamour changed.
In the wolf's place, a human figure stood—
A maiden shape—a maiden tall and fair.
Yes—one I knew too well—before me stood
In white robes glistening—spirit-like, fair and
pale.
I swear it on my soul—Françoise Thilouze,
The girl that stands before me there—the same—
She stood before me then alone—that night—
That very moment. I could almost see
The wolf into the maiden melt away.

SEC. She spoke not—did she?

PIERRE. Muttering as she passed
Few words of doubtful import, she was gone.

DE VARD. A perilous hour for maids to walk abroad.

MONT. Who but a witch would walk at such a time?

DE VARD. Nay—that would I so fair a witch to find.

MONT. Call her not fair whose actions are so foul.

DE VARD. 'Tis said the sea-nymphs had unsightly tails,
And yet above the waist they showed divine.
'Tis but mad Nature's merry wantonness,
Who thus deformity with beauty joins,
To mock man's judgment, and confound the wise.

SEC. Witness! What is it thou bearest in thy hand?

PIERRE. I pray you, reverend sirs! Be not deceived.
This limb's not what it seems. 'Tis hers—I swear it.
'Tis her right arm. 'Tis hers indubitably.
Two mornings since, 'twas whole and sound as mine.
Next morning, as your eyes behold it now,
She bore it bandaged. Some mysterious harm—

Which she with studious industry conceals—
Which she's ashamed of—which she dare not show—
Befell her on that intermediate night—
That very night I set my snares beside
The spot, where I beheld her, as ye've heard,
Restored to woman's from a bestial shape.
That very night, this limb I now produce,
Which seems the flesh and member of a beast,
Was taken in the toils. Oh! is it not palpable
What work she was about, and how the fiends
Their victim and confederate have betrayed,
As they're accustomed? Here's a proof that shows
Her guilt in largest letters. Let her say
How was her arm hurt? Let her answer that.
Unbandage, Françoise! Let her tear away
Those rags that hide the witness of her crimes.

1ST COM. Unbandage her. *(Arm unbandaged.)*

2ND COM. The truth's inevitable.
Praise be to God! Her guilt's undoubted now.

3ED COM. Right arm with right. The members correspond.

PIERRE. Oh! damning and indisputable proof!
Abhorred witch! What canst thou answer now?

FRAN. *(Aside.)* I dare not answer, 'twas an accident
Befell me, by a chance explosion caused,

Helping my father in his laboratory—
I dare not—lest the mention of his name,
On the old man's head might draw their malice down
And thus involve him in my danger—Nay
Were I to answer what's so probable,
'Twould gain no credence here. So let it pass.

1ST COM. What mutters the false witch between her teeth?
We're far too scrupulous. We're but wasting time.
What need we now with further witnesses?
To me so clear and plain the case appears
That in my judgment sentence may be passed.

2ND COM. Let everything be done with decency
And done in order.

3RD COM. Let her, if she can
Explain——

FRAN. Then, 'twas an accident—no more—

SEC. How done?—How did it happen?—Let us hear.

FRAN. Ye've had my answer. I've no more to say.

1ST COM. She mocks us. Good. The matter here may end.

2ND COM. Nay. Let her call what witnesses she will.

3RD COM. Can aught gainsay what's been already sworn?

FRAN. Then summon all the sufferers from your streets.

Out of your hedges and your ditches bring
The lame—the halt—the blind—go fetch them all.
Call in the poor—the friendless—the forlorn—
The sick—the maimed—the mad—the miserable—
The poverty that in lugubrious dens
On offal feeds, too poor even to pick up
The crumbs that from the rich man's table fall,
For menials flung—the misery that's amassed
And makes its nest in murky labyrinths—
That rots and swelters in unwholesome mews—
In crowded alleys—in o'erpeopled lanes—
In filthy crevices and fetid holes—
Wherein the rawness of the imprisoned air
Strikes chill, but heals not, bearing on its breath
Congestive poison and pestiferous dew—
Wherefrom it issues to corrupt the light
And doubly taint the tainted atmosphere—
The sickness that from cold and hunger draws
Its baneful life, and lives upon neglect,
Yet dies for want of nursing—the disease
That by self-gendering aggravation grows
And festers into plague—the homeless want
That to the frosts of winter, day and night,

Its naked skin exposes unabashed
Without a shred between—the wretchedness
Whose rude and undiscriminating rags
Brush the silk hem of sleek prosperity,
Yet take no virtue from it—bring them all
Bring in the dying—if ye dare, the dead—
And here on oath—with due solemnities—
In this high presence—let them testify—
The herbs I gathered were of use sometimes—
That often I bewitched them out of woe—
And if I leagued with devils, I drove away
The devils of Hunger, Pain, Disease, and Death.

1ST COM. Here's insolence again.

2ND COM. Proceed we next
To search her body for the brands of Hell.

3RD COM. Considering all we've heard, and ascertained,
By proofs so clear, 'twould seem superfluous——

1ST COM. My voice is for the search.

2ND COM. The same is mine.

3RD COM. And your joint voices are irrefragable.

FRAN. Yet spare my sex this last indignity.
Oh ye were born of women—all of you
Had mothers once—and some of you this day
Have living mothers—sisters haply some.
I do beseech you think of them before
Ye make their sex dishonoured in my shame.

Since in your malice, and your cruel thirst
For human blood, or ignorance, or disdain
Of feelings shared by creatures ye despise—
Though we're of the same nature, flesh, and blood,
From the same God descended, as yourselves—
Ye seek my life—Oh take it on the spot—
Yes—take it now—this instant—'tis no more
Than in the course of Nature I must lose
Some few years hence—a trifle in the account,
Of long eternities that are to come.
If torture be my doom, pronounce it now.
I can expect no better at your hands
From what I bear, or have already borne,
And knowing how ye're cruel—how ye burn
To glut your cold hearts with vicarious pain—
To the Infinite Mercy have I prayed, and pray
For strength to bear the worst—Then do the worst.
Why not be brief? Why pause upon your work.
For vain observance, wasting precious hours
With foolish processes, and futile forms?
What hinders you? No further proofs ye need
Who never needed any. Then at once
Rush to the extreme ye long for—grasp the goal
And sublime summit of your grand desires.
Yes. Tear away my flesh with red-hot tongs—
Saw me asunder—cramp and crush my bones

With rack and screw—impale me—roast alive—
Wring out my wretched, insignificant life,
In gory drops, and every drop a pang—
But spare me—spare me—from that open shame.

1ST COM. Drag her away—regard nor shrieks nor tears—
'Tis only what her insolence well deserves.

2ND COM. But should we not be present? No report
Is certain as eye proof.

3RD COM. Agreed for me.

FRANÇOISE *is dragged out. Exeunt omnes except* DE VARDOIS *and a few attendants.*

DE VARD. Upon her face her condemnation's writ.
Out of her eyes immitigable doom,
And ruthless judgment shine. Temptation there
Assumes too palpable and too sweet a shape,
For us to suffer. 'Tis imperative—
It must be done. She must be out of the way
Ere he returns. There's no alternative
For us—from this most dire extremity
No loophole of escape. Against the power
Of so much beauty we contend in vain.
One smile of hers were fatal. One soft glance

Shot from the silken fringes of those eyes,
Would, in a moment, like a winged spark,
Set Victor's passionate nature in a blaze,
And blow our plans in air. A desperate ill
A desperate remedy demands. Alas!
That I should say it, those innocent-shining orbs
Which light like stars the round heaven of her face,
Must set in death—the darkness of the grave
Must quench their mild but perilous influences,
And that sweet mansion made of lovely flesh—
That tabernacle of a consummate soul—
The feminine fulness of whose rounded forms,
As in the statuary's marble mysticism,
Lie coldly chastened and subdued beneath
The calm inscrutableness of maiden thought,
And sad disguise of sorrow—must be made
Incapable of mischief—But indeed
It irks me somewhat to be thus concerned
In taking of her off—but 'tis their work
Who are her lawful judges, and not mine.
Are they not all, grave, just, and holy men?
They surely would not wrong her, or abuse
To unrighteous ends their sacred ministry
And high judicial functions. Still methinks
It might be done, since done it must be, with
Less ceremonial superciliousness—
Less idle ostentation and parade—

Less lingering over vain formalities,
And over-strained observance—which prolong
The tedious agonies of suspense, and seem
To me no better than the extravagance
Of wanton pride, and barren cruelty.
I would not vex with one superfluous pang
The lamb that's slaughtered for my natural food—
The vilest reptile I'm compelled to kill
In self-defence—much less can I delight
In making cruel and inhuman sport
With this unfortunate girl, whose death indeed,
But not whose aimless torture I desire.
But how prevent it? They will have it so—
These reverend fathers. Nothing else it seems
Contents the holy hunger of the Church—
The church of peace and love—the church of Christ.
And this protuberant zealot Montmorenci—
Who after all's but one of your half wits,
Halting 'twixt knave and fool—of course he must
Shine foremost in the godly galaxy—
Well—'tis not my affair. I'll think no more of it.

Enter MONTMORENCI *and other Lords.*

1ST LORD. Who doubts her guilty now?

MONT. That did I never.

2ND LORD. 'Tis said these secret characters of shame
On witches' persons branded by their fiends—

The abominable brands of guilty joy—
Are as indelible as the mother-marks
Some babes are born with.

3RD LORD. Were she not a witch,
I could have wept for pity of her fate,
When in their rude and unrespective grasp,
She showed such tender, touching, modesty—
Swooning at last from very helplessness
And overwhelming sorrow—

1ST LORD. See! They come.

Enter Commissioners, Officers of Court, &c. FRANÇOISE *supported.*

SEC. Prisoner! Attend the sentence of the Court.
They judge thee guilty—sentence thee to death,
And to the secular arm—the authority
Of temporal kings and courts, and civil powers—
Give up thy wicked body to be burned.
So brief thy sojourn in this world shall be.
We charge thee, therefore, let thy precious soul,
Be henceforth all thy care. Thy tottering steps
Approach the verge of hell. Think—think how soon
The hurrying hours may bring thee face to face
With those abominable and pernicious fiends,
For whose vile sake thou hast made thyself accurst,
And been a rebel both to God and man.

We bid thee still repent. Though not on earth
Repentance shall avail to save thee from
The sentence now recorded, yet alone
By late repentance of apostate souls
Can their offended mother—holy Church—
Take them to her wounded bosom back again.
Thereby alone can thy recovered soul
Escape the penalty that after death
Awaits thee, quivering, in eternal fires.

ACT IV.

The Remorse of Manon.

Scene 1.—*At the door of* Thierry's *cottage.* Ludovique *and* Manon Thierry.

Manon. Oh! when will he return?
Lud. Be still, my child!
Peace—peace—I say. For all this restlessness
Will he return the sooner?
Manon. Some mischance
Must have befallen him, surely.
Lud. Gracious Heaven!
Has sorrow turned thy brain? He's gone no more
Than half an hour. And haply many a mile
The holy man must wander ere he gain
The dread intelligence.

MANON. Ill news fly fast,
And every prating or malicious fool
Will burst to blazon it. The very dogs
Will howl it in his ears. He'll never come,
He'll never dare to face us with the worst,
He'll never dare to tell us, "She must die."
LUD. Now rest, my daughter! I beseech thee rest!
Oh! Heaven! how wild and haggard are thy looks.
I shudder when mine eyes encounter thine.
Could I but see thee weep—'twould comfort me.
But since this trial—since the fatal hour
Thy cousin was condemned, though groans more deep
And terrible than earthquakes seem to rend
That tender bosom—I declare to Heaven—
No—not a single tear thine eyes have shed.
MANON. I cannot weep. Their sorrow is accursed
Who mourn as I do. Often when our tears
Seem dried up at their sources, they go up—
Up—up—to damn us.
LUD. Ah! what words are these?
MANON. What a base coward is conscience! Ere the deed
Of infamy's been done, it speaks with soft
And puny whisper like a whimpering child,

Afraid to breathe its wish. But afterwards,
When from the black—irrevocable past
The spectral memory glares, then conscience rings
Its loud alarum on the soul, and strikes
With deadly sting. 'Twas but some hours ago
That I conspired, and swore a thousand lies
Against her innocent life, and she will die
By me betrayed and slain. Where wert thou then,
Oh conscience! where was thy reviling voice—
Thy warning admonition? Stricken dumb,
Abashed and frighted by my bold desires.

LUD. I knew my Manon had a tender heart—

MANON. My God! My God!

LUD. But there's some mystery here.
This desperate frenzy—this immedicable
And adamantine anguish, so unlike
The gentler sorrow that beseems thy sex,
So shocks—so fills me with amazement, child!—

MANON. That I might die! O God! That I might die.

LUD. Indeed her fate sits heavy on my soul,
Thy groans find echoes there. Unburden then
Thy bursting griefs—shape sorrow into song—
And I'll strike in and chorus it with mine.

MANON. Father! I'll live to save her.

LUD. Would thou couldst!

MANON. I feel as if I dare not pray to God.

But, for her sake—my prayers were barren else.—
I'm bold to invoke all blessed influences
That are His emanations—and connect
Our thoughts with Him—this omnipresent air,
That tempers with its cool and innocent kiss
The fever on my brow—the all-seeing light
That images His glance—the clouds that rise
From earth to heaven like winged mediators,
And come like angels back—yon skies that seem
His living shadow—

LUD. God be thanked! She prays.

MANON. Away! They answer not. The skies are deaf,
And with their obdurate and awful silence
Mock me and curse me.

LUD. Patience! My poor child!

MANON. Is this your justice? Through her innocent head
To smite my crimes?

LUD. My daughter! let us hope
Her judges may have mercy.

MANON. Quack me not
With that fool's cordial. Was she not condemned
For sorcery? Is she not a witch by law?
The sons of God—the Fathers of the Church—
Affirm it, and would swear it on the books
They reckon holy—Would I were a witch
Myself, and could by sorcery set her free—

Since Heaven's so pitiless, I dare ask from Hell
Infernal aid.

LUD. Oh Manon! Oh my child!
Wildly thou talkest, impiously I fear.
But 'tis no wonder. Ye were born and reared
Twins of the same sad fortune—the same year
Made orphans by a like calamity.
And side by side your girlish beauty grew.
Your only emulation was the love
From baby eyes reflected—

MANON. Love! ye saints
And holy angels!

LUD. What a look was there!
Why dost thou start? Oh Manon! oh my child!

MANON. It is my punishment, and I deserve it.
God knows, 'tis but a pin's point to my crimes.

LUD. Thy crimes!—This must be madness! let her rave.
Alas! I know were never sisters bound
By ties more tender, or more close than theirs.

MANON. My sisterly regard was shown in this—
I've helped her early to a place in heaven.

LUD. Alas! it mattered little what they wrung
From thy reluctant lips. Their hearts were steeled
Against all pity, and her doom prejudged
By malice or revenge—

MANON. Aye. Lay it on.
I'll never flinch, nor ask thee to forbear.
LUD. And why must I be silent? Why forbear?
Have I not equal privilege to mourn?
Though reason calm the current of my grief,
And age smooth o'er its surface, not the less
It rends my inmost soul. Then swell sad heart!
Ye watery sluices open! kindle lips
With my profound and passionate complaint!
Oh! my poor Françoise! oh my sister's child!
Darling that I have dandled in these arms,
Whose infancy these eyes have watched so long!
Is this the sum of all our hopes and pains?
Are thy sweet studies, all thy fond pursuits,
Thy meek and mystic meditations, all—
To have no happier issue? Ah! poor thing!
With beauty, grace, and goodness, far beyond
The common of thy sex, thus stricken down
In the fair spring and blossom of thy life
By bloody spite and barbarous cruelty!
MANON. Oh me! Oh me!
LUD. And was it thou, poor lamb!
Thy butchers dared to liken to a wolf?
Just so the monster in the fable mocked
The lamb he slaughtered. So it fares with thee,
By bloody men, by cruel beasts devoured—
By beasts!—unjust!—there's no comparison.

Wolves would have spared her—tigers have bow'd down—
Abashed to pity by her innocent looks.
Hate changes men to devils, the raging heat
Of angry passion scorches up the springs
And chokes the flow of gentle charity.

MANON. Aye. Devils! Devils!

LUD. Yes. I remember well
The day her mother died. 'Twas at the last,
When pale and wasted on her couch of straw
She lay, encircled by the sacred gloom
Of sorrowing faces, 'mid the solemn hush
Of death-bed stillness, which her failing voice
Broke through with feeble whisper, as she breathed
Into my pent-up heart her last commands.
" Dear brother! if our Michael's simple ways
Should fail to shelter and protect his child,
To thee, as to a second father, I
Commit the precious charge." In loving words
Her spirit so passed away—the dregs of life,
Spent in that fond endeavour. All in vain—
Oh! how can I acquit me of the task?
Alas! what can I do but weep, but weep?

MANON. That I might die—might die!

LUD. Oh! Michael! Oh!
Unhappy brother! hadst thou been content
With labour's humble lot as I have been,

And never with idolatrous ardour plunged
Into the vanities of science—still
Thy steps were safe as mine. But no, but no.
Thou must have learned flights—by books and stars
Thy soul was lured astray—Behold! what comes
Of all thy learning and astrology!

Enter FATHER SIMON.

F. SIMON. Peace rest beneath the roof where sorrow dwells!
Look up to God! my children! (MANON *falls.*)
LUD. Ah! She's dead!
Thy looks have killed her.
F. SIMON. Nay. 'Tis but a swoon
Of sudden terror—Feel, her pulse returns.
She stirs. Take heart. She'll waken up too soon
To life and misery.
LUD. Then our hopes are done.
The sentence is confirmed. I pray thee, speak.
MANON. Speak, father! speak, and let us know the worst.
F. SIMON. The worst is over, when the worst is known.
There is no more hope of pardon. She must die.
LUD. The stake! my God! The fire—
F. SIMON. 'Tis so decreed.
Look up to God! my children!

MANON. He blasphemes.
Shall I look up to God that am accursed?
Shall I—that am to outer darkness doomed?
I that have sinned against the Holy Ghost?
Sinned against light and knowledge—head and heart—
Damned for a deed that cannot be forgiven?
LUD. Accursed be every hand that lights those flames!
Damned all who help to bring or bind her there!
F. SIMON. Stay, Ludovique! thy bold blaspheming tongue.
MANON. I charge thee, father! Interrupt him not.
Stay not the course of justice. Said I not
I was accursed?
F. SIMON. I charge thee daughter! by
That God who is the father of all truth,
Whatever sin thou hidest in thy soul,
To thy soul's peril, dark and undivulged,
Confess it freely, and confess at once.
Here and hereafter 'twill assure thee peace—
And haply to thy soul's salvation tend.
MANON. My peace is parted, never to return.
The darkness of my soul no ray divine
Can now re-visit ever. The despair
That bows me down confession cannot purge.

The wrong I've done lies out of the reach of God,
Which, even if he could he would not cure.
But I'll at least be frank—what I confess
Shall be the damning truth, however vain.
What infamy I've earned, or now deserve,
I'm not the coward to shrink from. Hear me then,
My fathers! spiritual and natural, hear!
And shudder as ye hear. My wicked arts
Have slain my cousin. Jacques Reynard and I
Her murderers are. 'Twas in our guilty brains
Was hatched that brood of lies that grew to life,
And ripened in her ruin—our device
That wrought upon Pierre Bloui's simple soul,
And won him to denounce her and accuse
Of crimes, whereof she dies. All—all is false—
False—false as hell. And now ye know it all.
Ye understand who drag her to the stake—
Who light the fire—who are her murderers.

LUD. Ah! little I suspected whom I cursed.

F. SIMON. Let this instruct thee, son! to curse no more.
Vengeance is God's. To God be vengeance left.

LUD. Come back that curse!—but oh, my breaking heart!
If I survive this, grief can do no more.
Nay, from thy lips even how shall I receive

What else were quite incredible? Thou!—
thou!—
Oh Manon! Thou to join that pack of hell!—
To run with them in hounding her to death—
To be their agent and accomplice in—
In this—the bloodiest and the blackest deed
That ever cried for vengeance up to God!
What bastard grafted off a savage stock—
What gipsy changeling alien to my blood—
Have I been housing? On what tiger's cub
My fondness wasted? Oh my child, my child!
I feel—I feel this villany of thine
Will crush me down, and bow me to the grave.

MANON. Have no more pity, father! Spare
me not.
Heap up reproaches till they touch the clouds—
My towering guilt shall overtop them all.

LUD. When in these loving arms I took thee
first—
A new-born babe—thy mother from her bed
Gazing into my face with speechless joy—
Oh! in that happy moment would that God
Had smitten thee to death with sudden plague,
Rather than thou hadst lived to do this deed!

F. SIMON. Cease, Ludovique! Have pity on
thy child.
For more of pity than reproach she needs.
No sinless sorrow knows such agony

As the remorse she feels—remorse, the true
Forerunner of repentance.

LUD. She repent!
Nay. Though she reach Methuselah's utmost age
She'll not have grace or leisure to repent
This monstrous sin.

F. SIMON. "Judge not, lest ye be judged."
God will not break the bruised reed, nor thou
Refuse all pity to thy penitent child,
Whose looks that scarce dare lift themselves to thine,
Should find a passage to a father's heart.
Look up, my child! Despair not. Look to God.
There's mercy left for many such as thou,
And many worse. But come. We must not lose
Our time in talk. There's business to be done.
With our best speed and diligence we must
Release this innocent girl——

MANON. Release her? How?
By what means, father?

F. SIMON. There's an easy means.
Thou shalt unsay before authority
The story that condemned her, and impeach
What thy confederates swore.

MANON. And thinkest thou
These kites that thirst so hotly for her blood
Will on my simple recantation baulk
Their high-born cravings, and forego their prey?

F. Simon. How now! Thou falterest?
Manon. I! Misjudge me not.
Father! I'll follow thee to hell itself
Could that avail us. Bring me face to face
With direst danger, so that it repair
The wrong I've done, and rescue her sweet life—
Then kill me if I flinch. But ah! too well
I know their selfish aims—their cruel hearts—
Their hard—relentless—bloody policy.
F. Simon. Think not so basely of the men that God
Has armed with office and authority—
But come. At Montmorenci's are they met.
We'll seek them there. The endeavour must be made,
The issue rests with God.
Manon. This moment—then.
I follow thee—
F. Simon. Nay. Never risk success
By aught unseemly. Get thyself arrayed
In cloak and coif. I'll wait beside the stile.
'Tis much the nearest way.

[*Exeunt* Father Simon *and* Manon.

Lud. Aye, get thee gone;
Thy sight grows hateful to me from this hour.
Alone—alone—I feel. Yon outward world
To my old age looms dark and terrible,

And through the twilight shadows I must grope
Bereft of every solace. All my hopes
Are now in death. I'll bury me indoors.
The looks of men would only trouble me.
Adieu! adieu! to daylight and the world!
Silence and darkness my companions be!

[*Exit.*

SCENE 2. *Room in the Chateau de Montmorenci.* MONTMORENCI, DE VARDOIS, *other Nobles, Commissioners and other Ecclesiastics, at dinner. Servants attending.*

DE VARD. No more excuses, Marquis! The repast
Is worthy of the gods.

1ST COM. Profanely said.

2ND COM. Correct it thus—worthy of Paradise.

DE VARD. Nay, Adam and his wife were fed on herbs
And fruits—a meagre diet—worthiest of
Those days of ignorance. Here's variety
They never dreamed of.

3RD COM. Quite a wanton plenty,
And rich profusion of delicious meats.

DE VARD. The smiling seasons have combined to flush

This board with golden gifts. The woods and fields,
And teeming waters have exhausted here
Their utmost luxury, till the fabulous horn
Sounds fabulous never more. Our mother Earth
Has drained her bosom of its milky sweets.
This feast's a miracle. See. The feathered tribes—
The shining spoil of streams—the savoury flesh
By freedom fed and flavoured—fruits that fell
Of their own ripeness from the abundant boughs—
Roots rich and soft with pulpy nourishment,
And fat with sugary sap—luxuriant herbs
And luscious condiments that cool the blood,
And let the jaded sense relax itself
By quaint and slow degrees.

1ST COM. We're much indebted
To the fine taste and hospitable care,
That crowd such sweets together.

2ND COM. And attest
However scanty our good host's domains,
Their wondrous wealth and high fertility.

3RD COM. Who doubts it, or denies?

DE VARD. Your cook—is he too
The produce of the estate?

MONT. Yes. Born and bred.

DE VARD. He does his breeding credit.

1ST LORD. I'd have sworn
He's late from Paris.

DE VARD. He's a genius—he—
A kitchen-artist. How supreme is mind—
How science glorifies the meanest cares—
And with what magic alchemy transmutes
Our nature's gross necessities! We enjoy
These rarer dainties, daintily devised,
With nobler relish—taste with sense sublime—
Whereby the bestial appetite's absorbed,
And into fairer faculty refined—
As muddy rivers melting in the sea,
And through his crystal pores distributing
Their long-accumulated impurities,
And native foulness, with the silver foam,
And shining blue and green assimilated,
Lose all their turbid natures.

1ST LORD. Finely said.

2ND LORD. De Vardois's humourous.

3RD LORD. Nay. That's nothing new.

MONT. I pledge you, Abbot! In a brimming glass.
Champagne?

1ST COM. I'm honoured.

MONT. Come. Fill up. Fill up.
De Vardois, you!

DE VARD. Then Burgundy for me.
That's the true life-elixir.

MONT. How! What's here?
What uproar breaks on our festivity?

Enter Servants, FATHER SIMON, MANON THIERRY. *Two last as if held back partly by Servants.*

1ST SERV. Messieurs! His reverence would not be denied.

But, spite of prohibition, made his way.

F. SIMON. On me the blame. I come for life and death.

My business told, most fully shall account
For this intrusion, and, I know, excuse it.
Nay, certain am I, your august displeasures
Would for delays have held me answerable,
Since every moment wasted is a wrong
To suffering innocence. For the girl Thilouze—
On her behalf I come—for her I plead.
She's innocent—innocent now beyond all doubt.
A plot's confessed—a wicked plot contrived
For ends and purposes of base revenge,
And every charge against her falls away,
Built up of falsehoods, frauds and perjuries.
Nor can I doubt, inquiry made, at once
You'll order her release.

MANON. Release—Ha! Ha!

MONT. What baggage have we here? Who dared to give
This common slut admittance?

2ND SERV. She attends
Upon the curate.

F. SIMON. By your leave she's here
On my behalf, and indispensable.
1ST COM. Condemned and innocent! What's all this?
F. SIMON. The proofs
Are clear and certain.
2ND COM. Of her guilt no doubt—
They were this morning, and they still remain.
F. SIMON. Your pardon, sirs! I deal advisedly.
Let this young maid be questioned. 'Tis the same
Who gave to-day her testimony against
Françoise Thilouze, her cousin. Let her speak,
Or to be brief, her story I'll unfold,
And she shall answer for its truth. She comes
Spurred on by sorrow and remorse, before
This high and holy presence to declare
Her cousin innocent—nay, most foully wronged,
And to her own abundant shame, confess
Her part in a conspiracy devised
By a discarded lover of her cousin,
One Jacques Reynard, to gratify his spite
And devilish vengeance. In a jealous fit—
An hour of womanish weakness—by this villain
Seized with malicious cunning to infuse
Into her ears his leperous sophistries,
This girl was tempted to betray her friend.
And she and Jacques together wrought upon

A third accomplice who with them conspired—
A simple credulous creature—Pierre Bloui,
Whose wonder-loving ignorance, all inflamed
By the sly art and treachery of Reynard—
It came that trivial matters and events
By no means dark or marvellous in themselves,
Were swelled to wonders in the dubious light
Of loose interpretation. These believed
Pierre's own untutored story, blended with
The grosser tales and fictions of Reynard,
As by some natural cement, furnished them
With what they needed most—solidity—
Coherence—probability. Thus it came
That your high reverences were deceived,
And your supreme authority betrayed
To woful error. I beseech you now
Consider this appeal—that so the accused
May with all possible convenience be
Restored to freedom. Let the maiden say
If I've expounded truly.

MANON. Gospel truth
Is not more true. Should this bad sentence stand—
If at your hands my cousin suffer death—
'Tis I'm her murderer, and her innocent blood
Shall sink me down to hell. But not the less
I warn you, holy prelates! at your doors
Her death, and my damnation, shall be laid,

If ye persist in this injustice done
Upon my instigation.

DE VARD. Saucy wench!

1ST COM. But softly, fathers! This is not the time
For fresh inquiry!

2ND COM. Steps preliminary
Have to be taken—information laid,
And summons issued—ere we can address
Ourselves to disinter established facts,
Or reconsider a concluded case.

3RD COM. Besides, 'tis nowise certain we've the power.

DE VARD. 'Tis obvious now the business is to dine.
On certain days the Church prescribes to fast.
Therefore on other days we're bound to feast.

F. SIMON. What say your graces? Have I heard aright?
What! Are there times when stricken Innocence
May vainly challenge Justice?—sue in vain
To those who're sworn to do it, and dispense?
When reckless power has done a cruel wrong—
A grievous wrong—a wrong indisputable—
Has blindly done it—for all men are blind
Sometime or other—in mistempered haste,
Misguided zeal, or rooted obstinacy—
Must every motion to redress the wrong

Be made by clock and bell—those sacred claims
That prove the proudest—melt the hardest hearts—
The privileges of anguish undeserved,
That stir some touches of humanity
Even in heathen bosoms—must all these—
Shall justice—righteous judgment—right itself,
Following the rising or the setting light,
Like shadows come and vanish, or depend
Upon the deaf, inexorable hours?
Alas! Alas!

1ST COM. Old man! dost thou forget
Beneath whose roof—before what presence—here
Thou standest?

2ND COM. Where with force and violence
Thou hast intruded—

3RD COM. Speaking evil too
Of dignities!

MONT. Intruded! By the Lord!—
Which no pretended business can excuse.

DE VARD. A father too—a father of the Church!
The Church against the Church—the sin of schism—
Which of all sins all Churches hate the most—
I hate it too—myself—at dinner-time.

MANON. Yes. To forsake the platter and the cup—

To rise up flushed with wassail and with wine—
And rescue innocence from unrighteous death—
That were—that were—a fatal precedent.

DE VARD. A wilful maiden!

MONT. Fellows! See to her.

1ST COM. 'Tis idle, parleying. Let her be removed.

2ND COM. Young maiden! Thy demeanour ill beseems
Thy sex and years.

3RD COM. And little helps the cause
Ye come to advocate.

F. SIMON. Nevertheless be just.
I pray you be not prejudiced to wrong
By our rash utterance. Let it not be said
Our skilless conduct of a righteous cause
Possessed your minds with thoughts unfavourable
To a just judgment. For this frantic girl
She merits no regard. The quick remorse
That's working in her is not yet refined
To clear and godly sorrow. Ah! The excess
And violence of her anguish have unsphered
The motions of her soul. But that she's true
And brings the truth to light can any doubt?
Her very frenzy proves her honest heart,
And shows her tale authentic. Then on me,
If we've offended, and forgiveness
Submission cannot win, let all your wrath

And penalties be piled—yet hear me still
On her behalf, whose cruel doom precludes
An abler advocate. She's been foully wronged.
Your duty and your privilege it becomes
To see her righted. Men are fallible.
The wisest, whether by mischance or fraud,
May own themselves deceived—but fools alone
Harden themselves in error. Yet 'tis not
For mercy to the guilty that I plead.
Mercy, sweet handmaid of high power, belongs
Rather to God than man, or only counts
Among the proud prerogatives of kings.
From you a nobler virtue I require,
And hope for! Justice—one that's not beyond
Your present powers to own and exercise—
And yet an humbler too—that never courts
The vulgar adoration—that affects
No pomp of outward circumstance, yet is
Most truly godlike, being from God derived—
A virtue vulgar natures scarcely feel—
Never appreciate, never understand,
Much less exhibit—whose calm front befits
The sterner grandeur of heroic souls.
Oh! show this virtue yours. If hearts you have
Inclined to softness, let them melt indeed,
But melt with pity for the innocent,
Compassion for the oppressed. Extend to her
Your fruitful sympathies, and vindicate

Thereby the majesty of Law, assailed
By fraud and perjury and conspiracy.
1ST COM. Father, this comes too late. The case is closed,
And our decision final.
2ND COM. Sentence passed.
No power that's less than royal can reverse.
3RD COM. We therefore beg you'll speedily cut short
This trespass on our leisure.
F. SIMON. 'Tis enough!
I take my leave in sorrow.
MANON. Dashed so soon!
To it again. Conjure them to relent
By Bacchus! By the bottle! Those are names
Must touch them surely.
F. SIMON. Your authority
Includes the power to respite your decrees.
You cannot pardon, but you might delay.
Three days are all I ask! Three days of grace,
That formal application may be made
For royal mercy. 'Tis not possible
In briefer to effect it.
1ST COM. We refuse
In brief your application.
2ND COM. That's our answer.
For there's no matter to proceed upon.
We cannot countervail, or set aside

Recorded judgments, or endanger rule,
Or violate the sacredness of forms,
By an irregular process based alone
Upon the bald confession of this girl.
3RD COM. Whose mind too visibly defaced abates
The value of her statements.
MANON. Tush! A leech!—
By touch of pulse determine on the spot
Whose wits are soundest here.
1ST COM. Too palpable
And obvious the design is, to suggest
A moment's question.
2ND COM. 'Twould create distrust
Of all proceedings, and discredit bring
On justice ever after, to permit
Her single recantation and disclaimer,
And incoherent raving, to impugn
The weightier and more relevant testimony
Of other safe and honest witnesses.
3RD COM. And what she swore this morning now to unsay
Discredits her for ever.
F. SIMON. Come away.
My child! My child! 'Tis madness to persist.
MANON. Then, I beseech you, send for Jacques Reynard,
Set me before his dark and knavish face,

And if I cannot make him prove himself
Liar and coward, then tie me to the stake,
Beside my cousin.
1ST COM. Cut the matter short.
We're rooted against change.
2ND COM. And have already
Spent too much breath and leisure in the length
Of this discussion.
3RD COM. Therefore be advised.
Cease to pursue this matter further, lest
It issue to your hurt.
F. SIMON. That moves me not.
Perish all earthly interests, hopes, and aims,
Could I by their abandonment extend
Her life one single hour. But I perceive
'Tis all in vain. The will of God be done!
My feeble voice can profit her no more.
To thee, O everlasting Providence!
I do commend her. Make her sufferings short.
Oh! how much longer shall the oppressed on earth
Await deliverance? How much longer, Lord?
Alas! in our despair we turn to thee,
Scanning the future, as the weary eyes
Of worn-out watchers in the dead of night
Anticipate the dawn——

MANON *(struggling with servants, and hurling one from her to the ground.)*

Ye Priests and Peers!
Do ye not tremble? If there be a God
Beyond that azure dome, he surely will
Deliver and avenge her.

MONT. 'Tis insufferable!
Drag out the frantic wench.

F. SIMON. Be still, my child!
Come with me. Come. 'Tis vain to parley more.

MANON. What! go dismissed, and never tell my mind!
Think not that I'm so easily put off.
Nay, let them bury me ten thousand leagues,
Or wedge me in the focus of the globe,
Or drown me in unfathomable seas,
My mangled atoms still shall find a voice,
And in the roar of desolating winds
The sobs of prisoned earthquakes, and the growl
Of ripe volcanoes, bellow to the heavens
My irrepressible curses. Off with you,
Ye menial swarm! Stand off. For I will speak.
What reverend sirs! Are these the laws of France
That smite and slay—that punish and condemn
But never save. Is this your justice—this—
A bottomless pit—a grinning Golgotha

Whose brink is paved with skulls and skeletons—
Its sides built up of bleeding carcases?
And have the holy canons of the Church
No other aim—no other interest
Than blood, blood, blood? How? is there no escape—
From your cold condemnation no return?
Oh more inexorable than the grave,
Which yet some day shall yield its victims up!
Is there no pause—no respite—no revision—
No possible backward path whereby the chance
Of human error may be rectified?
Shall men like beasts be slaughtered? Human life
With less deliberation blotted out,
Than would attend the killing of a snake,
Or wait upon the common forfeiture
Of mere official rank or privilege?
With you are trial and inquiry death?
Does your touch wither? Do your glances blast?
Is this your pious zeal, is this the way
Ye honour God, forgetting his commands,
By holding up a prize for perjury,
And consecrating murder? Do ye scowl
Because ye hate the truth? I know your hearts
Too well—too well—ye mitred hypocrites!
Ye holy butchers, solemn murderers!

Ye privileged traffickers in righteous blood!
Ah! woe betide the Church the day she gave
The keeping of her sacred oracles
To you—profaned with your adulterous breath
Her Holy Sacraments—What are ye better
Than merely titled executioners—
Whose only office is to kill—kill—kill?
The headsman's office is more honourable.
He does his bloody service openly,
And wears his degradation in the face,
Of the divulging daylight. But your deeds
Though not less bloody, are disguised and masked
By specious forms and solemn sophistries.
In labyrinths of law—in murky caves—
'Mid dim tradition's obscure intricacies—
Ye privily lurk, and stab the innocent—
And crouched like spiders in unseemly dens,
Ye sit, and gorge the malice of your hearts
With cold and gloomy joy. Ye ravening wolves
Clad in sheep's clothing! Whited sepulchres!—

(*Towards the end of this speech,* MANON, *having been some time struggling with the servants, is finally dragged out.*)

MONT. White-livered slaves! Why stand ye thus agape?
Aye. Drag her. Gag her. Are ye not enough?

Fear ye to touch her? By the Lord of Heaven!
The fiends her cousin deals with, must have claim
To full possession of her kith and kin.

1ST COM. I scarce can speak for horror! How! so young!
So passing fair! Yet inly so defiled
By that licentious and irreverent soul!

2ND COM. Ill natured and ill taught.

3RD COM. Ill taught indeed.
Are these your lessons Father?

F. SIMON. Holy sirs!
The teacher can no more than nurse the seeds
By nature planted. From her birth this maid
Showed the same fearless and unfaltering spirit.
I would she'd been more chary of her speech
In this high presence. But your graces know
'Tis neither in my power nor any man's
To stop the torrent of a woman's tongue.
Alas! my heart is heavy—Oh! that words
Could touch you yet.

1ST COM. No more of this—no more.

2ND COM. We may not hear.

3RD COM. Methinks we've heard enough.

MONT. Away with him—Away with her and him.

(FATHER SIMON *is led away by the servants.*)

SCENE 3. *A forest by moonlight.* PIERRE BLOUI *alone.*

PIERRE. The spells are surely past—the enchantment o'er—
Since the proud Manon bids me meet her here.
Now courage Pierre! The game's in thine own own hands.
Be not abashed. Take courage. Be a man.
What more is wanting for a woman's love?
What should I fear? Hell's phantoms failed against me!
And shall her beauty daunt? Shall I be scared
By fairer shadows? By bewitching forms
And sweet proportions of harmonious flesh?
What is there in a red and juicy lip
To make me tremble? In a brilliant eye
To scorch my manhood up? Enough. I feel
That I grow valiant—see what wit is worth
When not enchanted. But she comes! She comes!

Enter MANON.

Where now is all my resolution fled?
The blood goes curdling inward from my face.
Almost I wish to shun her—Fool!—to quail
And shiver at the threshold of that joy
Thou hungerest for the most! Wretch that I am
She must despise me ever—But what's this?

Ye powers of Heaven! What damned sorcery
Hath changed the springing music of her gait
To that unsteady languid heaviness?
What sudden grief's untenanted her cheeks
Of their familiar roses? Is it care,
Or fell disease that feeds with seaming tooth
Upon the blooming tissue of her skin?
Where are her sparkling eyes, her merry smiles,
Her pouting lips' provoking prettiness?
Oh, Manon! Manon! What sad work is here!
What ails thee, darling? Ah! God send it were
That thou wert pining for thy loving Pierre!

MANON. God send thee quittance of thy folly, Pierre!

PIERRE. Aye, flout me. Flout me. I will bear it all,
Though in good time I look for some amends.

MANON. Look on these hollow eyes, these shrunken cheeks.
Feel the cold wrinkles of my flabby hands.
See my limbs totter! Hark! how hoarse my voice!
And think, are these the ministry of love,
Or I fit toy for amorous fooleries?

PIERRE. I care not Manon, how thy face is changed.
To see thee wretched, pains my loving heart
But never can affect my constant faith.

No, only love me—only now be kind.
To me at least thou shall be beautiful—
In every change my pretty Manon still.

MANON. Good honest Pierre! I know thou lovest me,
Words are not wanted to confirm thee true.
And if my cold heart should at last be touched,
If I were minded now to listen to
Thine earnest vows, and put thee to the proof
What would'st thou do to gain me?

PIERRE. God of Heaven!
What would I not? Oh! name some desperate task.
Set me upon a foaming torrent's verge—
Some precipice through whose black-gaping breast,
For ages hath the stream a channel gored,
With splintered rocks heaping its violent course,
O'er which, as o'er the battered skeletons
Of hated foes which rancour never quits,
But still gloats over with insatiate rage,
It chafes and thunders ever—set me there
And bid me wade across. A word from thee
Would win me to it. Bid me grapple with
The fiercest beasts that through the sleeping woods
Spread tyrannous desolation—single out
The strongest—wolf or bear—I'll throttle him
Or perish at thy feet.

MANON. Enough of this.
And keep thy distance. What I'd have thee do—
Stand off, I say—has no such madness in it.
'Tis nowise dangerous—scarcely difficult—
But only needs despatch and earnestness.
I would not have thee risk thy life for me.
PIERRE. I'd gladly risk and lose it for thy sake.
MANON. Not so extreme is that which I require.
PIERRE. Make me thy slave, and use me as thou wilt
I'm proud to serve thee.
MANON. Then attend. Be calm,
And keep thy hands off, and thy distance there.
Expect no fond confession from my lips—
Hope not to hear them pour out honied words,
Or make thee drunk with wild conceits of love.
But as thy soul is precious to thee, Pierre!—
If lurks therein the faintest sense of God—
The slightest terror of his judgment—hear!
Oh! Pierre! A bloody murder we have done—
Have in a deed of butchery dipped our hands,
Whose black aspect was never paralleled
Through the long annals of recorded crimes.
We've plunged above our heads—we're steeped in guilt—
Guilt that the devils should grin at and admire,
'Tis even in Hell so unimaginable.

Our arts have practised on the sweetest life
Was ever mansioned in humanity—
We've cropped the fairest blossom of all times.
Vile—vile—assassins that we've been and are.
For us what mercy stands available—
What plea's authentic? How shall we escape
God's wrath and due damnation, whose award
Is by no long to-morrow separated
From where we're placed this moment—whose abyss
Yawns under us—unless from sheer despair,
From absolute wreck and bare abandonment,
Like water from the barren rock, we strike
And compass her deliverance?

PIERRE. What's all this?
I cannot understand.

MAN. Françoise Thilouze—
My cousin—we've betrayed her.

PIERRE. How! betrayed!

MANON. Her blood's upon us.

PIERRE. How?

MANON. The dreadful doom
That waits for her this moment—that's our work.
'Tis we—'tis we—that drag her to the stake—
That cut into her flesh with cruel cords—
That kindle round her limbs the pitiless fire—
Oh God! Fit emblem of our pitiless hearts!

PIERRE. Does Manon weep because a witch shall die?

MANON. Pierre! If she be a witch then I'm a witch.

And Jacques Reynard is honest—and thyself
In wisdom thou'rt a very Solomon.
And there's no sin or sorrow upon earth—
No knavery or iniquity anywhere.
And the world's rulers are all good and just,
And never do us wrong. And everything
Is as it should be in this puzzling world—
And all is goodness, grace, and holiness.

PIERRE. Since first the world began 'twas much the same.

MANON. Say yonder skies are but a paper scroll,
Which thou canst scoop and shrivel in thy hand—
The sun—the moon that shines above thee there—
The stars, and all their sister lights of heaven—
Say with a puff of breath thou canst arrest,
And momently extinguish—say this earth
Whereon we stand, with all its living forms—
This infinite universe, with all its worlds—
Seen or unseen, are but a shadow limned
Upon a hollow space—say matter reigns
Predominant over all—that things of sense
Alone have real being—nothing hid
Beyond the visible—no diviner soul

That moves this mighty pageant and informs—
No God above to judge and punish crime.
Oh! say all this—or if thou canst say more—
Whatever contradictions thou canst dream—
Whatever false, absurd, impossible,
Thy fancy can invent, or speech affirm—
But never say poor Françoise is a witch.

PIERRE. I thought 'twas fully proved.

MANON. Proved! But to whom?
To those who never looked for proof at all?
What's in their idle fables? Wolves have lost
Their paws before, by similar accidents,
But 'twas not witchcraft, till a score of knaves,
And one poor fool—I say it to thy face—
Thou, Pierre!—found profit in supposing it,
Or making, it a supernatural fact.
When—oh, thou numskull!—when her innocent hours
She gave to God and Nature, gathering herbs
'Neath the chill moonshine, and the inclement air,
For noblest uses, art thou not ashamed
To think of her as other than she was—
The sovereign of her sex—its living crown—
No less for inward than for outward charms?

PIERRE. Was Jacques—the clever Jacques—was he deceived?

MANON. Art thou so dull, so thick of wit, so blind—

So wrapt in hundred-fold credulity—
As not to see what quality of stuff
His knavish tales were made of? Does it need
A tongue to tell it to thy waking senses,
What else to the apprehension of a babe
Were palpable, that every word he coined
And palmed upon thee for the gold of truth,
Was merest tinsel? Be his dupe no more.
Look through his thin and threadbare artifices.
Thou knowest the traitor my poor cousin loved.
Thou knowest as well what favour he obtained—
With what a calm and modest majesty
She spurned the obtrusion of his treacherous love.
For this he hated her—and from the hell
Of his dark hatred and ill-brooding spite
This train of devilish machinations grew,
Which ripened in her ruin. God!—just God!
And I was his accomplice—even I!

PIERRE. Aye, thou!

MANON. What then! I was as vile as Jacques.
No name in all the calendar that's kept
For black damnation is too black for me.
She was my playfellow—my friend—my sister—
And I—have murdered her. My motive learn—
I too was mad with love and jealousy.

PIERRE. Have I a rival then? His name—his name—
That I may curse it.

MANON. Spare thy time and breath,
That folly's long burnt out. The oblivious past
With black, opaque, obliterating tide
Rolls o'er its idle fires.

PIERRE. Her noble judges—
The reverend and the holy——

MANON. What of them?
No gods are they, exempt from crime and wrong,
From madness or from error. They've their wants,
Their appetites and passions, like the herd
Of meaner mortals. Tempted even as we,
Their plans are gilded by the privileges
Of lofty station—their high-sounding sins,
Sanctioned by specious names, to greatness swelled
By wider scope and license. Thus how often
Does power, by bloody uses long depraved,
And never called to reason or account
For its excesses, by unfelt degrees
Become thereby disnatured, and contract
The vulture's taste and appetite for blood;

PIERRE. To slay her thus—without a motive—thus—
So beautiful and innocent too! What doubts
Distract me, Manon!

MANON. Are thy wits astray?
De Vardois—Montmorenci—have they not
A son and daughter—must I spell it for thee,

Like a child's lesson? Canst thou not perceive
Their obvious interest in my cousin's death?

PIERRE. Yes! I begin to see—the glimmering truth
Breaks into form before me.

MANON. On thy knees!
And give God thanks that thou—that thou alone—
Of all in this most damning deed concerned,
Hadst yet an honest thought.

PIERRE. Alas! alas!

MANON. Well mayst thou cry alas! But never faint,
And lose no time in wringing of thy hands.
Be prompt—be zealous to repair this wrong
Thou'st helped to do.

PIERRE. Repair—repair it! How?

MANON. To Paris straight!—Françoise may yet be saved.

PIERRE. To Paris! Manon!

MANON. Is not Victor there?
Else were she not in danger now—then go!
Seek Victor with the speed of all thy limbs.
Tell him what peril waits the maid he loves.
They say he's high in favour with the king.
Her pardon he'll procure.

PIERRE. Too far—too far!
Ere I reach Paris all is over here.
But to return in time—impossible.

MANON. Stay not a moment, travel night and day.
In thy just ardour and beneficent zeal
Forget—forget impossibilities.
Though mountains rise before thee, and the leagues
Thou hast to master, multiply themselves
To the infinite of distance, do thy best,
And Victor will do his. So just a cause
God will befriend, and look you, do not doubt
Reward will follow.

PIERRE. That I cannot doubt.
Oh! yes, if we succeed, our noble foes
Will not forget to compensate the man
Who rashly baulked them of their prey. No doubt!
They could not reach de Vardois, but on me
They'd condescend to be revenged, and I
Being useful then no more to him or them,
Would surely be surrendered to their spite.
No doubt! No doubt! 'Tis manifest enough
I should be well rewarded.

MANON. Slave and coward!—
But anger's wasted on thee. Thou assume
The privileges and dignity of man—
Thou prate of love and marriage! Never more
Come near me after this. Her innocent life
Might by thy means be spared—the bloody meal

By thy connivance and assistance spread,
Snatched from the jaws of murder and revenge.
And look! thou tremblest like a child! Vile coward!

PIERRE. I fear the danger! let the truth be told.
In such affairs as these I'll never move.

MANON. How easily thou wert induced to join
This black conspiracy! Oh! how little pains
We took to make thee plot against the life
Of one that never injured thee!—And now,
Wilt thou less easily be wrought upon
To make what poor amends are in thy power?
In what's unjust and base, and despicable,
Art thou so hot and zealous—but in good
So sluggish and so cold?

PIERRE. What I did ignorantly
That I did innocently! The wrong was done
By Jacques and thee. Repair it, thou and Jacques!

MANON. How sharply that retort strikes through my soul!
Ah, could I—could I but recall the past!—
But come, we trifle—So thou wilt not go?

PIERRE. I will not. That's enough.

MANON. Refusing this,
Think'st thou to prosper in thy suit to me?
Is this thy love, false braggart?

PIERRE. Ah, thy cruelty
Has done for that. By kindness love is fed.
'Tis wonderful how little it requires.
A glance—the veriest shadow of a smile—
Sustain its spiritual life—bereft
Of every hope, it dies.

MANON. Still dost thou love me?
Still love me, Pierre, with all my wickedness—
That foul confession clinging to my lips—
Soiled so with crime—that even were I as fair
As Venus rising from the oozy deep,
Should make me ever in thine eyes abhorr'd,
Deformed and ugly? Dost thou love me still?

PIERRE. Whatever wrongs thou'st done are nought to me.
The Lord forgive my weakness! Almost I
Could love thy very wickedness! which seems
To bring thee nearer me.

MANON. Thou talkest well,
But trial shows thee false.

PIERRE. Nay, Manon, Nay!
Put me, oh put me on a heavier proof.

MANON. Art thou to choose that gavest me the choice?

PIERRE. I meant no proof or trial such as this.

MANON. To any sort of proof thy promise binds.

PIERRE. This is no trial, therefore I'm not bound.

MANON. With my completest means thou shalt be bribed.

PIERRE. Then all or nothing. Bribe me with thyself.

MANON. Go then to Paris—If Françoise be saved,
I'll marry thee!

PIERRE. Thy hand upon it!

MANON. There!

PIERRE. Swear it!

MANON. How! Listen then! So help me Heaven!
Strain thou thine every nerve—thine utmost pains—
On thy return I'll marry thee.

PIERRE. 'Tis done.
I take thine offer, girl!

MANON. Away at once!
Lose not a moment.

PIERRE. Yet one kiss—one kiss—
In earnest of our bargain.

MANON. Get thee gone!
Is this a time for toying, when her hours
Are to a second numbered? Get thee gone!
Or I renounce thee ever.

PIERRE. Ah! but one.

MANON. Thou sullen booby, have thy will. But now—

This instant—off!

PIERRE. Behold! behold! I fly.

MANON. And hark! if thou be slack, I'll hear of thee.

Then never venture to come near me more.

[*Exit* PIERRE.

MANON. The creature, how I loathe him—at his touch
How my flesh creeps! But even as I've sworn
Will I keep honourably the dreadful vow.
Oh, thou my God! accept the sacrifice,
And sanctify the penance! What remains?
Can nothing more be done? Aid me remorse!
Spirits or fiends, that lash the guilty soul
For good or evil purpose, help me now!
I have it. Yes! There's yet another chance.
The thought's an inspiration. Heaven itself
Must aid my just design. For if she dies,
God's justice is impeached. In place of right,
Chaotic rudeness and confusion reign,
And naked tyranny bestrides the world.
At least I'll try it. Henceforth, what's life to me,
Tied to the gross embraces of a fool?
And now to prove what my weak sex can do.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*Road through forest. Groups of male and female peasants passing and repassing. At a greater distance, a little on one side, gens d'armes, halberdiers, exempts, monks, peasants looking on. Sounds afar of chopping and hammering. Smoke at a distance. Enter* SYLVANUS, *peasants, &c.*

1ST MAN. We should be near.
2ND MAN. Ah! yonder is the place.
I see the moving multitude. I hear
The sounding axe and hammer. There they go—
Labourers and monks and soldiers.
1ST MAN. What a swarm!
It surely has begun?
1ST WOMAN. The saints forbid!
For ten gold louis I would not be late.
I pray you let us hurry.
2ND MAN. Nay. No fear.
No need, my girl! of hurry.
SYL. See. The smoke
Its thin grey curtain lazily unfurls,
Yet hugs the morning air.
2ND MAN. Not from the stake
That smoke proceeds. 'Tis but preliminary.

The form and order of the spectacle
Have not commenced. In yonder wavering crowd
The many-voiced murmur, and the restless stir,
The noise and haste of urgent preparation,
Are all that I discern. This way, 'tis certain,
Must the procession pass. And I'll be sworn
The good Lord Abbot's scarcely out of bed.

2ND WOMAN. The halberdiers were early upon guard.
I rose to see them passing—

2ND MAN. Or thou wouldst
Have lain abed for hours. We know thee, wench!

2ND WOMAN. Have I not leave to lie abed as long
As my Lord Abbot?

SYL. Nay, how sluggish seems
The rosy dawn herself at getting up!
So loth, as it were to stir and lift herself
Out of the moist arms of the wanton clouds—

3RD MAN. Indeed—indeed—the surly face of Heaven
Forebodes no good. The burdened atmosphere
Is black with tokens of impending showers.

SYL. But look you when the young indifferent day
From their embraces draws, the baffled mists

Transfer their fondness to the foolish earth,
And fold her round, and on her modest brows
Print shining kisses, till they grow so fond—
In amorous ecstasy they dissolve and die,
And waste their substance and their watery wealth
On her abundant breast—and notice next,
How when the whining melancholy winds,
Like servants waiting at untimely hours
On the late revels of devoted lords,
Would drag them off, the fascinated fools
Still spread abroad their limp reluctant arms,
And linger to the last before they go.

3RD WOMAN. This may be fine talk, but do tell me, Paul!—
Thou'rt something weather-wise—in good plain French,
Be these the signs of rain?

1ST WOMAN. Of rain! Oh Lord!
Heaven shut the watery sluices for a day—
One day at least!

4TH MAN. My mind misgave me much,
When my old tyrants, the rheumatic pains,
Returned last night to plague me.

3RD WOMAN. Out upon thee!
Thou dotard! with thy pains, which are no more
Than a just penance for a wanton youth
Which left thee rottenness to scourge thine age.

4TH MAN. Now rot thy tongue for that! Thou saucy jade!

3RD MAN. 'Twas a home thrust. But touching rain—'twill come
Sooner or later. If it come not now
At least 'tis nearer now than yesterday.

1ST WOMAN. More soldiers—see the lines together draw.

2ND WOMAN. Brave fellows! Are they not?

SYL. How much ado
They make with this poor girl!

3RD MAN. And wherefore not?
Not every day they light upon a witch,
Or find such goodly fuel to make a blaze of.

1ST WOMAN. Now God be thanked! the sun is coming out.
'Twill yet be fine—and 'twere a pity else.
A heavy shower might play such havoc with
The fire, and spoil our sport.

2ND MAN. Nay. Never fear,
'Tis cared for—that—They know what they're about.

2ND WOMAN. I should be loth to lose the spectacle.

3RD WOMAN. And so should I.

4TH MAN. They come so seldom now—
These solemn acts and holy sacrifices.
But I remember in my younger days—
When Spanish Charles was Emperor—

3RD WOMAN. To the devil
With Spanish Charles, thy younger days, and thee!
Thou prosy time-killer!
4TH WOMAN. Go say thy prayers.
1ST WOMAN. If I must pray, for sunshine I would pray.
SYL. Oh! cruel girl! were it thy chance to burn
As yet—who knows—it might be, in thy turn,
Upon some like occasion, those red lips
Would pray another prayer. Too gladly then
Thou'dst welcome every shining drop that fell,
Nor deem it grievous though they poured as thick
As on thy glossy head the raven hairs.
Poor wretch!
3RD MAN. I marvel now the wicked witch
Calls not her fiends to help her in this strait,
And sluice the ground with showers.
2ND MAN. Her hour is come.
The powers of darkness have deserted her,
And near the holy crosses of the monks
Their devilry would fail.
1ST WOMAN. So burn she must.
SYL. Poor wretch! poor wretch!
3RD WOMAN. Thou heretic to show
Such pity for a witch!

SYL. If witch she be
Have I not leave to pity her?

3RD WOMAN. She deserves
Her punishment.

SYL. Why then I pity her
That she deserves it.

3RD WOMAN. Who would spare a sin
Approves it surely.

SYL. I approve it not.
But which of us shall dare to cast a stone
Upon the sinner, we who never sinned?
In his own case were any one of us
The judge, would any, for the blackest crimes
Call down so dire a sentence on himself?

1ST WOMAN. No more of this, I pray—'tis wearisome.

3RD WOMAN. Shall crimes like these remain unpunished then?

SYL. That's not our business surely, my sweet friend!

3RD WOMAN. Cut off must be the wicked, so 'tis writ.

SYL. Cut off—but not by us, nor in our thoughts.

3RD WOMAN. But some must do the work, or 'twere not done.

SYL. It is not ours to punish or condemn.
They do the work that are appointed, best,

And I thank God, my girl! that 'tis not ours.
More to be pitied than the smitten, child!
Are they that smite. Alas! by the iron laws
And stony girdle of necessity
They walk constrained and gyved. The powers they wield
Are not their own—the sovereign elements
Which seem to make them mighty, are but means
And signs and engines of their own subjection.
Like the sad genii of Arabian tales,
The slaves of rings and lamps, they cannot move
Out of the enchanted coil that hems them round
Inexorably stern—their strength's controlled
For purposes and ends they wot not of,
Or not by them designed. They bind—they burn—
They crush and tear—they torture and they kill—
But from their horrid task once entered on,
They cannot turn, or tear themselves away,
For tenderness or pity. They must on
As they began—must rigorously suppress
All gentle thoughts—all loving impulses—
All soft compassionate instincts—must be deaf
To the celestial voices. Unto them
'Tis not permitted to be merciful.
But we, my friends! are happier, for we're free
To follow Nature. The divine desires—

The godlike promptings of our inmost souls—
Whereby God speaks to us, if he ever speaks—
We need not stifle. Our humanity
Is not like a sealed book, whose outward shape
We bear about us, but whose inner sense
Has no significance for us. Why—ah, why—
Should we refuse our sympathy to sorrow—
Why scourge the bleeding bosom of affliction
With coarse contempt and heartless mockery,
Because its wounds are cankered with despair—
Its ills incurable—or because, alas!
The desperate burden of a guilty soul
Weighs it down hopelessly? Is it not enough
That sin must bear the inevitable pangs
Of self-reproach—must undergo the doom
Of open shame, and public punishment—
But we, like fiends, must glory in its pain,
And triumph in its suffering? If this girl—
This poor inheritor of the wrath of God—
This feeble victim of a potent church—
This quarry stricken by the kites of Christ—
If innocent she be, your mirth's unjust—
If guilty, then 'tis cruel. Hath she done
To any of us a wrong? And if she had,
Are we not Christians? what forgiveness means
Have none of us been taught? This wanton scorn
Would seem but mere revenge—

1ST WOMAN. How long must we
Endure this prosy fellow?
2ND WOMAN. Did we come
To hear him preach a sermon?
3RD MAN. Come. No more
Trouble our patience.
3RD WOMAN. Wherefore art thou here,
Attending on this cruel spectacle?
Sharing the wicked deeds that others do?
SYL. Swept on the current of the crowd I came
In thoughtless—foolish—fellowship. Often thus
We do the things we disapprove, because
Another does them with us. But a word
Is good in season. I withdraw myself
And herd no longer with you.
3RD MAN. Well away.
2ND WOMAN. A goodly riddance.
1ST WOMAN. He was ever thus
In opposition. Left to himself, himself
He disagrees with. Gracious! How I hate
These men who reason about right and wrong!
But come. 'Tis time we moved.
2ND MAN. 'Twere better wait.
For near this spot must the procession march,
And yonder through the trees I see them come.
1ST WOMAN. Perdition to the witch! A merry day—
A merry day we'll have. (*Distant Music.*)

2ND MAN. The music! Hark!
And voices in accord.
1ST MAN. A solemn strain.
1ST WOMAN. We'll join the chorus.
2ND MAN. Silence.
3RD MAN. Stand aside.

Enter procession of monks and other ecclesiastics. Three Commissioners, DE VARDOIS, MONTMORENCI, *other nobles, some on horseback.* FATHER SIMON *following. Chariots at a distance, with male and female spectators. Procession and crowd of peasants in continued movement. In the middle of the procession,* FRANÇOISE THILOUZE, *in black penitential robes, wolf's paw round her neck. A monk with crucifix on each side of her.*

Chorus of Monks and Peasants.

I.

When knowledge into crime
By impious pride and mad ambition led,
To heavenly heights sublime
On reckless pinion rashly soars,
Or with audacious tread
The dreadful depths of hell
Presumptuously explores,
In vain the woods with woful warnings swell.

Vainly many a mystic sound
Wakes with wild and ominous wail
The slumbering pulses of the midnight air,
Scaring the wolf as he prowls around,
Or lurks in his mountain lair,
And smiting with supernatural dread
The heart of the watcher, lone and pale,
Who watches at night some loved one's bed—
Sad as disembodied cries—
Cries from shrieking mandrakes torn,
Tones that wander o'er the skies—
Wander homeless and forlorn—
And dismal as some spirit's shrill voice that sails
Floating upon icy gales
From the kingdoms of the dead.
Vainly is the wrath divine
Writ in many a sombre sign—
Writ in meteors overhead—
Meteors pale and blue and red—
Which the wind-racked seaman fears.
Vainly from the conscious spheres,
Shuddering as they whirl them round
In choral dance profound,
Fall like sparks prophetic tears,
Flash mysterious utterances.
Vainly the bright hierarchies above,
Shedding agonies of love
O'er us of their seraph-glances,

Foreshadow and reveal,
By many a mystic gleam—
By prodigy and dream—
The sorrow and the fear that angels share and feel.

II.

In vain—in vain—before
We tempt the perilous track,
The voice of God's commissioned counsellor
Would warn the wanderer back.
Yes. If man would only hear
Conscience speaks in solemn fear,
When on Heaven's mysterious ways
Human eyes would rashly gaze,
Or when too curiously profane would peep
Beneath that unknown deep,
Wherein, as in a fathomless ocean's breast,
Eternal secrets rest.
"Oh, fool!" with awful voice she cries,
"For yonder barren prize,
The poor rewards that empty knowledge brings
The tricks and fantasies of pride—
The fleeting shadows of unreal things—
Whereby no soul was ever satisfied—
For transient pleasures—perishable toys—
To forfeit heavenly joys,
And madly to surrender up

The eternal heritage above."
Ah! not the red Circæan cup—
The drunken dotard's deadly love—
So surely to destruction leads,
As this vain desire of knowing
Things forbidden to be known.
Light enough of God's bestowing
Have we for all earthly needs.
And duty's path is ever clearly shown.
Beyond lies sin's impenetrable gloom,
Or fairy bowers of lust that end in death and doom.
Ah! by this lust of knowledge first
Were our happy parents cursed.
Lust of knowledge sprang from hell—
Thus the rebel angels fell.
Rest we then with faith content
In the twilight Heaven has sent,
Till the glorious dawn appear
To make all secrets plain, and every mystery clear.

III.

The soul with guilty thirst
Of lawless knowledge fatally possessed,
By its own hopes accursed,
Shall never more—shall never more—
Be capable of rest.
A phantom light for ever

Shall lure it on before.
But to draw near the goal of its endeavour,
To its wish shall not be granted,
Nor its passionate anguish blest.
Oh futile chase that issues in despair!
'Tis even as one that, with sense enchanted,
Should follow the shadows fair—
The purple shadows—the golden gleams—
Which the conjuror sun ere he bows his crest,
Calls up to kindle his shining dreams.
Deaf is earth, and deaf is heaven.
Nature, to avenge her laws,
Tired of warnings vainly given,
Like a slighted god withdraws
Into eternal scorn, and silence cold.
Yonder starry worlds behold!
As they glisten—as they glare—
Through the solitudes immense,
Almost with a living sense,
How they mock his impious prayer,
With an infinite despair!
Does the guilty spirit groan?
What's the sum of all that's known?
Mystery still with widening coils
The pride of reason foils.
Hark! from Hades' burning zone—
From the wastes where horror reigns,
Where from their lurid fire's eternal glare

Sulphurous emanations flow,
Glimmering over gloomy plains—
A cruel laughter springs,
Which, furrowing up the sleep
Of the primeval deep,
Hoarse through the vaults of space with jarring
echo rings.

IV.

The ways of Heaven are just—
The ways of Heaven are kind—
Who wholly unto God for guidance trust,
Shall perfect safety find.
Out of God our being flows.
He our strength and weakness knows—
Sees the reach of sense and thought,
What we can and what we ought—
Knows best within what bounds confined
Man's speculative mind,
The toil—the struggle for inquiry past,
Shall rest in peace at last.
Of old—before this wondrous earth
Was quickened into birth,
Or the fair universe awoke in pride
Of youth and beauty on the deep,
As on her marriage morning a young bride,
Dream-flushed and lovely, lifts her face from
sleep,
And darts star-glances from her quickening eyes,

That kindle up the skies—
Omniscience drew the circle round,
Whate'er was right for man to know,
Who ventures past that sacred bound,
Accomplishes the eternal woe.
And fearful is thy fall from light,
Wretch! to outer darkness tossed—
In abysmal chaos drowned!
Falling with perpetual flight,
Till the black depths—the bottomless gulfs profound—
Disturbed amid their terrible repose,
Shall on thy sheer descent inexorably close—
And discords, mixed of rage and pain,
Booming ever in thy brain
With delirious sense possess thee—
Spectral arms enfold and press thee
As of slimy monsters wound—
Twining—ever twining round—
Twining—grasping—holding fast—
Till hell itself absorb and swallow thee at last.

1ST WOMAN. A goodly pageant.
SYL. And the music too—
So excellently toned, it strikes the ear
Aghast with sweetness.
1ST WOMAN. Thou!—still here to trouble us
With thy dull prating!

3RD WOMAN. Yonder walks the witch
In funeral garb arrayed.
SYL. Oh! divine face!
Oh! glimpse of radiance beautiful though brief,
And mild as noiseless lightnings! — Eyes so sweet
And so unfathomable! A moment! Then
We miss them after like extinguished stars!
Ah! with what agony of the silent soul—
When sorrow bows her eyelids to the ground.
1ST WOMAN. What is it delays them now?
1ST MAN. Beshrew me! Friends!
But 'tis a lovely wench.
3RD WOMAN. The devil's a judge
Of beauty—doubtless.
1ST WOMAN. Of a fashion—See
The devil's in all the men. How they do stare!
Out of the way thou gudgeon! Stand aside.
SYL. The devil—I've heard it said, but never quite
Conceived the saying—was once, or is, transformed
Into a shape of light. And I'd as soon
Believe it, as that yonder angel-maid
Should be the minister of unholy deeds—
Those holy looks the horrid harbingers—
Those heavenly eyes the loose interpreters,
Of devilish and abominable thoughts.
Shall sin be sanctified in such a shape?

Shall God tempt man with beauty—Heaven and hell
Be leagued together for man's overthrow?
Shall He permit the bright hierarchies
Of heaven, and the awful agencies of hell,
To meet in damned and unnatural dance,
Blending their absolute antagonisms
And infinite opposition, to ensnare
Our souls with perilous shows? Eternal powers!
Who shape the course of matter and compose
The periods of the plastic universe!
Shall all your fairest forms, your most complete
And wondrous works, your high consummate strain
Of the aggregated forces, issue thus
In phantoms that embrace but to destroy,
And meteor lights that lure us to the grave?
Has Nature fashioned that excelling face—
Endowed that form with wondrous witcheries—
Only to blind and puzzle as with shams
And false similitudes of light? If this
Be so, let's never again put faith or trust
In fairest semblance—the most beautiful
Let us mistrust the most. Then happy they
Who never from their births beheld the light—
Who never on their foolish eyes relied,
Or built on vague appearance their belief,

Or fantasies of outward sense mistook
For the divine realities of truth.

3ED WOMAN. If thou must preach, postpone thy cruel gift
For more auspicious season——

2ND WOMAN. Have a care
Whereto thou wanderest, man, or there be hands
Will roughly handle thee.

GENS D'ARMES. Back! fellow! back!
Give way—give way—there.

OFFICER. Let the holy men
Have room to pass and breathe.

GENS D'ARMES. So. Clear the way.

The procession pauses, breaking into groups. People passing and repassing.

Chorus of Monks.

Quamvis stultus sit securus,
Deus tamen est venturus,
Qui purgabit Ipse purus
Corpora et mentes.

Magni cœlum et profundum
Quatient ictus, et rotundum
Terror agitabit mundum,
Pallidasque gentes.

1ST MONK. Sorceress! Thy time is brief.
Prepare to die.

FRAN. Prepare thyself. Art thou not mortal too?

1ST MONK. But not like thee to present death condemned.

FRAN. What matter a few years not worth account?

1ST MONK. In fiery pangs shall pass thy guilty soul.

FRAN. By bodily pain the spirit is still unharmed.

1ST MONK. Hast thou no fear to perish in the flames?

FRAN. What kills the soul alone we rightly fear.

1ST MONK. Eternal torture waits thy soul in hell.

FRAN. Not in thy power eternal judgments dwell.

Chorus of Monks.

Parum trepident insontes,
Lætæ placidæque frontes
Sint eorum, sicut montes
Quos oppugnant venti,

In procellis quum versentur,
Et nigræ nubes minentur.
At turbari non videntur
Sedibus retenti.

2ND MONK. Durst thou with face so calm look up to heaven?

FRAN. Yes. I've a father and protector there.

2ND MONK. Blasphemer! Does the wicked He protect?

FRAN. He's the only father of the miserable.

2ND MONK. If He protect thee, wherefore art thou here?

FRAN. His justice waits, but is not the less sure.

2ND MONK. This is His justice, that is done to thee.

FRAN. The ways of man are not the ways of God.

2ND MONK. We do His will that are His ministers.

FRAN. In doing a wrong ye're not His ministers.

2ND MONK. By His permission what we do—we do.

FRAN. The devil himself's permitted for a time.

2ND MONK. For thee nor God nor devil shall interpose.

FRAN. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Tempt me not.

2ND MONK. Thus Satan raves, divided from himself.

FRAN. I know—I know—the ways of God are just.

I dare not question His mysterious will,
And what He does not hinder He sustains.
Support me, Hope and Refuge of the oppressed,
To my weak faith Thy plenteous grace afford,
And in Thy mercy wash my sins away.

1ST MONK. Without confession dost thou pray to God?

FRAN. To whom but God alone shall man confess?

1ST MONK. To us that are the ministers of God.

FRAN. His ministers or not, ye are only men.

1ST MONK. To us the keys of heaven and earth are given.

FRAN. Shall mortal man the place of God usurp?

1ST MONK. To us 'twas given above to bind and loose.

FRAN. Shall man absolve another from his sins?

1ST MONK. We keep the keys—we watch the gate of heaven.

FRAN. Shall man assume the privilege to forgive?

1ST MONK. Through us — through us — the sinner's prayer is heard.

FRAN. I know one Mediator only—Christ.

1ST MONK. 'Tis we who hold His delegated power.

FRAN. I cannot waste my soul on human ears,
And least of all on yours, ye sullen tribe!
Whose hearts the cloister's clammy atmosphere
Hath with rank mildew eaten and consumed,
Leaving instead a cold and gloomy void,
That mocks the pleading voice of innocence
With barren echoes or inhuman jeers.

2ND MONK. Accursed witch! To prate of innocence!

FRAN. Pray God thine end be innocent as mine!

2ND MONK. This is but stubborn pride and arrogance.

FRAN. I take thy censure though 'twas wrongly meant.

2ND MONK. Was that in mockery or repentance said?

FRAN. I stand upon the threshold of the grave.

2ND MONK. Why then, confess, and make thy peace with God.

FRAN. To God, not thee, be my confession made.
And here, whatever pangs your spite inflicts,
I take for justice, which by Him dispensed,
Can never equal my exceeding sins.
But vex me not thou with thy vain advice,
And fulsome importunities, which are

A sorrow and a snare to erring souls.
My hopes of mercy and of grace depend,
Nor upon thine nor any human aid.
They grow above in heaven—above the stars—
They flourish there like climbing parasites,
Rooted and nurtured in the blood of Christ.

Chorus of Monks.

Paveant autem scelerati.
Sævum pondus est peccati.
Magis autem implacati
Ira Dei sævum.

Janua patet infernalis.
Ignis emicat lethalis,
Cujus qualis ardor, talis
Ardor est in cevum.

1ST MONK. Confess. Confess. 'Tis thy last earthly chance.
Confess. To all salvation's possible
Save to the impenitent. Confess and save
Thy soul from judgment.

FRAN. Oh, mistaken zeal,
And blind officiousness! Ye toil in vain.
Ye shall not move me to confess to you
In any wise—but not to God himself—
Much less to you—will I confess a crime
Which never I've committed or conceived,

Whereof I'm innocent—more—oh! more than thou,
Since in thy thoughts it finds a place at least—
Whereas—for me—I know not what it means.

2ND MONK. Thou liest. Jezebel! In thy throat thou liest.

FRAN. For this I bid thee fear the wrath of God.

2ND MONK. It falls on thee, thou wretched castaway!

FRAN. Who persecutes the wretched is accurst.

2ND MONK. Aroint thee, witch! Thy curse I do not fear. (*Crosses himself.*)

FRAN. To God, what sin worse than injustice shows?

2ND MONK. 'Tis not injustice sending thee to hell.

FRAN. The heart that's dead to pity—that is hell.

2ND MONK. Blasphemer! Silence! Else I'll have thee gagged.

FRAN. My silence shall condemn thee but the more.

2ND MONK. Nor speech nor silence shall avert thy doom.

FRAN. Worse doom than theirs not hell itself assigns,
Whose hearts, long hardened in habitual wrong,

Persist believing wrong is ever right.
I pray this doom from thee may God avert,
And teach me to forgive as One forgave,
Who dying, said, "They know not what they do."

Chorus of Monks.

Tempore peribit eo
Quisquis inimicus Deo.
Posthac non valebit reo
Venia perpetrati.

Tunc occumbet insolentis
Regnum veteris serpentis,
In lacum semper ardentis
Sulfuris jactati.

(Procession passes on. Exeunt FRANÇOISE, *Monks, Nobles, &c.)*

Chorus of Peasant Girls.

Pass on, the clouds of doom are gathering o'er thee,
Death's pageants gird thee round with ghastly show—
Yon pile that lifts its ominous brows before thee,
Their torches that afar like baleful meteors glow.
Earth from her bosom spues thee into infinite woe.

Through fiery gates of death
Thou shalt exhale thy breath,
And plunge from mortal pangs to endless pain below.

Depart, accursed! Descend to shades infernal,
To lurid wastes and seas of rayless fire,
Where night and desolation reign eternal,
And justice gluts for ages her insatiate ire,
Still with damned undying millions filling up the frightful pyre.
There impenitent despair insults eternity with curses.
There remorse, bereft of hope, his hopeless anguish aye rehearses.
Pangs that never know reprieving—
Groans that rend without relieving—
Sobs like shocks of earthquakes heaving—
Howling rage and hellish spite—
Mix their music never-ending,
Round the spheral slopes extending,
Like a stream in ocean blending,
With the dreary wastes of night.
Listening angels as they wander, wander on their missions high,
Shall pause in airy flight,
Beyond the brink of light,
And shudder at that sad but awful symphony.

Descend and prove what hideous utterances
Shall, issuing from thy lips, that chorus swell—
How the fierce horror of thy burning glances
Reflect the agonies of universal hell!

Now gapeth on thy soul that black hereafter,
Do subject demons thy behests obey?
They mock thee—mock thee with malignant laughter,
And grinning ghosts rebelliously deride thy sway.
Look not to them for aid or respite or delay.
False—false as human friends,
When sorrow's hour impends,
Who pour malicious scoffs, or coldly fall away.

Where now thy spells of might, thy words of wonder,
The types and engines of unearthly power?
Hast thou no withering dews, no blasting thunder,
No serpents to seduce, no dragons to devour,
By whose means relentless judgment might be cheated of an hour?
Ah! thy mystic reign is over, devilish arts no more avail thee—
Moon and stars give heed no longer, muttered charms and curses fail thee.
Go, for heaven and earth reject thee.
Go, the infernal realms expect thee.
None dare pity, none protect thee—

Every hope of pardon past.
Go, but not by hell forsaken.
Tremble! Tremble! Thou must waken
From the dream of death, o'ertaken
By the unpitying fiends at last.
They shall come, thy shrinking spirit in their grasp, to bear away,
Even now their pinions sweep,
Across the dismal deep,
And lash the sulphurous air, impatient for their prey.
Depart, the clouds of doom grow gathering o'er thee—
Death's pageants gird thee round with ghastly show—
Yon pile, that lifts its ominous brow before thee—
Those torches that afar, like dancing meteors, glow. [*Exeunt omnes.*

(Shouts and tumult in the distance. Enter peasants bearing CLEMENCE DE MONTMORENCI. FATHER SIMON. JULIET. *Male and female peasants, and other spectators.)*

F. SIMON. There. Lay her on this smooth and grassy turf—
But gently—gently.
JULIET. Fellows! do ye hear?
More gently—on your lives.

F. Simon. Some water. There!
Juliet. Alas! Alas! my lady!
F. Simon. Sprinkle it
Upon her face. She will recover soon.
Bless thee, my daughter! Give her room and air.
All tenderness and pity as she is,
The day's anticipated horrors weighed
Too heavily on her heart.
Juliet. Oh! 'Tis a loss
Not easily repaired.
F. Simon. What means the girl?
There's no such danger.
Juliet. Father! If we chance
To lose the spectacle!
F. Simon. Was the Marquis warned
Of what has happened?
1st Pea. One was straight despatched
To tell him.
F. Simon. Raise her—yet a little more.
'Twixt life and death she labours, like a flame
With difficulty kindled in a damp
And heavy atmosphere, her wavering senses
With cold obstruction fitfully contend,
And falter into consciousness.
Juliet. She sighs.
F. Simon. Again! That's well. Sadly we enter life,

And from the gloom of temporary death
As sadly we return.

JULIET. Her eyes! Behold!
She lifts them to the light.

CLEM. What have we here?
Ho! Juliet! Juliet!

JULIET. Juliet is not far
My dearest lady!

CLEM. I remember—Ah!

Enter MARQUIS DE MONTMORENCI: *Lords, Peasants, &c.*

MONT. Clemence! my darling Clemence! I rejoice
To find thee safe.

CLEM. Who's safe that has a soul?
Who's safe from judgment—safe but in the grave?
There only danger and temptation cease.
Oh! human nature's feeble, and the powers
Of darkness suffered for a season, rage
Like roaring lions. Surely hell's let loose.
And deeds are done upon this earth of ours,
Should scare God's holy angels—

MONT. Be composed
For none but friends are near thee.

CLEM. Have a care.
They're certainly possessed. What else? What else?

Eyes have they, but they see not, ears, but hear not.
Blind—blind. Deaf—deaf. Dear Father! Thou dost well.
Share not their counsels—sit not in their seats.
Oh! thou dost well to come away from them
And leave them to themselves. We're all—all blind—
But of all blindness that's the fatal sort
Which settles on the heart. Take heed. Take heed.

MONT. Her tide of reason's only on the turn,
And does not fully flow.

JULIET. How wild she looks!

(Shouts at a distance.)

MONT. This day, 'tis certain, are the powers of hell
Scourged in the person of their minister
Who's justly doomed to perish.

CLEM. Ah! the fires
Of godless persecution scorch the souls
Of those who kindle or who suffer them.
But surely—surely—'twas a blessed chance
That drew me hither, and by grace divine
The foolishness of my presumptuous soul
Was turned to saving mercy, when I saw
That fair pale face, by sorrow sanctified,

And worshipped as before a sweet saint's shrine,
That living image of martyred loveliness.
Then from the stony rock of my hard heart,
Struck by the spirit of God, a holy spring—
A spring of pity—gushed and overflowed
And swept me momentarily out of life
Into the neighbourhood of death and heaven.
The veil was lifted from divided worlds,
And through the shadow of death I passed, and saw
Beyond as it were a glance of the eyes of God,
Which cleared the mists of error from my sight,
And blessed me with eternal secrets.

MONT. What!
Another of thy visions! Foolish child!
Wer't not thy wits are somewhat gone awry,
I could be angry—

CLEM. Listen! I beheld
A troop of devils gush upward from the deep.
Through the airy wastes I watched them whirling, like
The smoke of burning forests, from afar,
Swept onwards by the persevering air,
And float and spread, till earthward they inclined,
Shrouding the hills and fields. I saw them poised,
Then swoop and settle, like a greedy flight
Of birds obscene, that in the summer swarm

Where the rank carrion steams. In course of time
They filled their place, and bursting out of bounds,
They flowed all round, like an ambitious pool,
That swoln in summer by the sudden rains,
Disdains its banks, and with its muddy ooze,
O'erwhelms the fertile plains. They held in fee
The subject-world, and took it for their own.
And for a season was dominion given
Into their hands, and privileges and powers—
Authority to smite and slay—to give
And take away—to govern and instruct.
Thus, by mysterious ordinance, they became
The sovereigns, and the teachers, of mankind.
They seized the imperial sceptres—they usurped
The kingly thrones and palaces—profaned
The temples of religion—shaped and swayed
The college and the senate—perched themselves
On pulpit and on rostrum—they were clad
In purple, lawn, and ermine, and their brows
With crowns, and mitres, and tiaras bound.
And thus dispensing to obedient crowds—
For men will fawn wherever there is power—
Their solemn laws—their reverend oracles—
For reverence waits upon solemnity—
They ruled and taught the nations much the same
As now by kings and priests they 're taught and ruled.

For with strange throbbings of the heart, and hot
And feverish chokings, and abundant tears,
I trembled for the future of mankind,
To those dark powers — that fearful fate consigned—
I looked in long despair, and pitied much
The sons of men, my brothers—I assumed
The extremes of all disastrous destinies,
When universal horror should bestride
And whip the world to ruin. I looked round
For bloody massacres—remorseless wars—
For tyranny—and anger—and revenge—
For every form of wickedness and woe,
Oppression—tumult—blasphemy—despair
And anguish of the nations—all in one—
I looked for all this to be meted out
In larger measure, and more dire results,
Than ever had been felt or known before,
Or by the saddest poet sung or dreamed,
In all the mad monotony of the past.
I looked for horrors upon horrors heaped—
Iniquity upon iniquity piled—
Infernal suffering and infernal crime—
By multiplication of inbreeding wrong
Made gross and monstrous and intolerable—
In indiscriminate mass accumulated.
In short—hell upon earth—the natural growth

And dire effect of diabolic change.
But change there was not, more than oft before
Accompanied the common ups and downs
Of governments, churches, emperors, popes, and kings,
Which dance awhile like puppets, and go down
And disappear thereafter—much the same
The world went on, as under human rule,
No difference, measurable or perceived,
In the outward face and general scope of things.
And wars there were, but neither less nor more
Than had been wont to be. Of woes and crimes
The customary measure. And the blood
Of human victims dyed the oppressor's scourge—
And human lives by tyranny's iron heel
Were trampled out like vermin—but no more,
Nor in proportions deadlier than beseems
The ghastly cravings of insatiate power—

MONT. Enough! my child! Enough!

CLEM. 'Tis wonderful
How little does the government of men
Differ from that of devils—

MONT. Oh! gracious Heaven!

CLEM. 'Tis current too. I've heard that once in Rome
Satan himself was made a cardinal—
And would have been, or was, elected Pope.
But when he came to touch the holy keys

His courage somehow failed him, and he fled,
And afterwards was seen no more on earth.

MONT. Fie! fie! my Clemence! These are vulgar tales
Unfitted for the lips of noble maids.

F. SIMON. So bitter, yet so young.

MONT. Alas! she raves.
'Twere well we could remove her. These mad words
Have here too many hearers.

F. SIMON. I beseech you
Be careful lest her strength be overtaxed.

CLEM. Remove me—yes—remove me quite away.
From France—or out of the world—or anywhere—
Far—far—from sight or knowledge of the deeds
They're doing yonder.

MONT. Send these knaves away.

JULIET. Hence, fellows, hence! Ye're needed here no more.

CLEM. Poor souls! I thank them. They were kind to me.

MONT. To-morrow to the chateau come. Your pains
Shall be rewarded.

JULIET. Hence! Away! Ye hear.

[*Exeunt peasants.*

CLEM. Why take we part in this phantasmagory?
What want we here? Why are we in the world?
Oh what a huge illusion is it all!
Is anything at all what it appears?
Who goes without a mask upon his face,
Or talks his naked soul? Religion—God—
Virtue and honour! What pretentious names
We make them in our acts—our daily lives!
What more's in all the piety we preach—
The goodness we go bail for to mankind—
Than costly garments kept for gala days,
From common life and business put aside?

F. SIMON. Each has it in his own power to be true.

CLEM. But whom to trust, however true oneself?

F. SIMON. Enough for each, of his own truth assured.

CLEM. But how shall one weak arm the truth maintain?

F. SIMON. Enough for one, if he maintain his own.

CLEM. Shall he not help another to be true?

F. SIMON. But truth is great—and ever will prevail.

CLEM. How long are we to wait, and suffer lies?

F. SIMON. Child! we must wait for God's appointed time.

CLEM. Alas! our life's a long perplexity.

F. SIMON. Too brief for most of us, I fear, my child!

CLEM. By our iniquities measured, too—too—long.

F. SIMON. In an eternal certainty 'twill end.

CLEM. And yet however long, too brief for truth—

Too brief for truth or certainty below.
Oh! who that lives—however long he lives—
Can ever hope—shall ever find the time—
To sort the motley multitudinous forms
Of many-headed error, or detect
The juggle of appearance, or prevent
Deception's weedy growth from getting head
Of our perplexed experience, and weak pains,
And choking up our way? The vain attempt
Wastes our best years, and so we're played upon
By one after another sleight-of-hand,
But learning nothing till too late to learn,
And fretted with perpetual change, till death
Looks in at the window, like a constable
On midnight revellers, taken at the dawn,
And with rude voice and rough peremptoriness
Breaks up the tedious game, and all we know
Is how much we've been fooled—

MONT. Enough of this.
Will my dear Clemence see the spectacle?
CLEM. No more—no more such spectacles for me.
How canst thou ask it?
MONT. Why then tarry here?
CLEM. There—where oppression like a vulture sits
To gloat and gorge on human agony—
MONT. Thou camest hither of thine own free will.
I did not urge thee.
CLEM. I had foolish dreams
Of doing good. My weakness I forgot—
Oh for the heart and sinews of a man!
MONT. Pray God thy brain, my Clemence, be not turned!
Think—think of what thou sayest? What right hast thou
Herein to judge, much less to interfere?
CLEM. No right but that of human brotherhood,
And human sympathy, and human love!
In woman's bosom there's a charter drawn
Direct from God, and registered in heaven,
Whereby she holds her high prerogative—
Her blessed rights and privileges of pity—
And there's no power in human ordinances
To rob her of it—

MONT. If this folly hold,
My grief's made cureless too.
CLEM. But never think
I'm frantic, father! There's a Providence
Watches the falling sparrow—how much more
Takes virtue by the hand. God's on thy side
Wronged innocence! Yes. And His Almighty arm
Shall help thee at the last. (*Shouts.*)
MONT. We must away.
The chariot! fellows!
CLEM. Father! tell me first—
Nay, tell me truly—is this maid a witch?
MONT. Why think so basely of her judges, child!
As that being innocent they'd her death desire?
CLEM. Judges are men, and men are fallible.
MONT. But, Clemence! these are men of high repute—
Of known experience and severity.
Their offices are honourable—their lives
In holiness and virtue correspond.
Such men, if any, have the ear of God.
For this occasion chosen—sworn to do
What's right and just—'tis folly to impugn
Or question their decrees, which God himself
Inspires, enforces, and authenticates.
CLEM. We know them by their fruits.

MONT. She's been condemned
On clearest evidence of established facts.
CLEM. The girl's no more a witch than thou or I.
Here in this village since her birth she's lived
A harmless—many say, a noble—life.
How was she never charged with this offence
Till Victor loved her?
MONT. That's her deadliest crime.
That proved her dangerous, when his fickle heart
Was drawn from right, from duty, and from thee.
CLEM. What, then! is it witchcraft to be young and fair?
Is loveliness a sin inexpiable—
And beauty branded with the curse of God?
Bright eyes—sweet looks—gentle and winning ways—
Smiles that like sunbeams quicken in the heart
The seeds of nature—tones that stir affection
Into responsive life, like answering chords
Of instruments in choral dance combined—
If these be magic, how shall they be saved
Who clothe their lives in like predicaments?
How shall those noble mistresses and maids,
Who sit above yon crowd in cushioned state,
Escape the due damnation? They must burn,

Or what's your justice worth? Since by the same
Sly witcheries—by the same seductive arts—
That drew their highborn lovers to their feet,
Was Victor won.

MONT. Yes. He deserted thee.

CLEM. Deserted me—as men are wont to leave
One idol for another. But, indeed,
For both of us 'twas better—that it was.

MONT. He left thee scorned, and slighted, and ashamed.
Yes—and for whom? A nameless vagabond—
A low-born slut—a minion of the soil—
A beggar's whelp, straw littered — one who's romped
With hinds and common labourers—been embraced
By sweeps and potboys—chucked under the chin,
And hugged and kissed, by foul-mouthed artizans
And mean mechanics—worse—a sorceress—
The auxiliary of hell—who's leagued with fiends—
Comrade and friend of God's eternal foes.

CLEM. Oh! father, on her sweet and patient face
I read the signs of God's eternal grace.
I saw her spirit in all its beauty bare,

Through clouds of grief, and anguish, and despair.
With heavenly glory was her darkness rife—
God's smile spread like a rainbow round her life.
She can, content with favour from the skies,
Their persecutions and their pains despise,
And as from heaven's immeasurable height,
O'erlook the shallowness of human spite.
Thank God for this, and praise His power divine,
Who out of darkness makes the daylight shine!

MONT. Thank God for this—she'll trouble us no more.

CLEM. She will be saved, my father! that she will.

MONT. And this enchantment gone—this snare removed—
Which now wraps Victor's senses—there's a hope
Of his return to reason. He'll repent
And make atonement for the wrong he's done
To my sweet Clemence, my poor slighted child.

CLEM. Ah! what was I to Victor? His regards
Could never stoop to me. He stands too high,
'Mid the unimaginable unmated air,
Above the humble measure of my thoughts.
I could not keep pace with his soaring soul,
Or bring him strength, or solace, or security.
'Twere just as if the all-overseeing sun

Should vex a violet with his lofty love—
The simple flower that hides herself away
From his consuming rays—

MONT. Fie! Clemence! Fie!
Such talk's unworthy of thyself and me—
Unworthy of the blood that's in thy veins.

CLEM. But pride's unworthy of a Christian soul.

MONT. Of great and small life's duties are composed,
And pride's a part of our humanity,
Not to be shifted like a suit of clothes,
Or changed to fit the fashion of the time.
'Tis sinful only in excess, my child!
Like any other passion it may rage
To violence, or be pampered to disease.
But 'tis our duty, in its due degree,
Reined in by moderation. To neglect
All right observance of our state required,
Is to disdain the bounteous gifts of God,
And to dilute humility to meanness.

CLEM. Shall no account be taken of the part
That Victor has to play? Will he be soothed,
So easily then—that proud and fiery soul—
Be led and dragged about by a hook in the nose,
Like a tame bear, by sticks and hunger tamed—
That's baited first, and petted afterwards?
Will he come back because you beckon him—

Repent, because you bribe him to be good?
Will he be taught by clever management
To cancel love, and memory, and revenge?
What! when he finds his hopes laid desolate—
His golden dreams besmeared with blood and dust—
The girl he loves thus cruelly murdered—

MONT. Fie!

My Clemence! Murdered! That's a dreadful word.

CLEM. But I've no better. Therefore it must serve.

And could I find a worse, I'd use it too.

MONT. Let Victor come. What matter when he comes?

What can he do? The dead return no more.
The dull grave listens to no conjuring voice,
Nor will the deaf and desultory winds
Restore the dust they scatter. Like enough
He'll pout and bluster like a peevish child
Over a broken toy. But Time will cure
As time is wont, his medicable woe,
And kill the languid embers of disease,
With fresh infusions. When the tempest lulls,
And calm reflection shining like a sun
Upon his futile fury and mad tears,
Shall show his airy castles battered down—
His flowery dreams uprooted and despoiled

In hopeless desolation—then indeed,
Like growth of tender shoots which winter's heel
Has trodden down and levelled with the dust,
But which the genial breath of spring revives—
So shall his first and early love once more
Awaken in his heart, and he return,
With downcast looks and penitential prayers
To make his peace with thee.

CLEM. Is this the pride
Thou 'dst have me feel? Is this—is this the way
The Montmorencis take affronts like mine—
The way that's worthiest of my blood and me?
What, welcome back the lover to my arms—
The man who slighted and insulted me—
As thou thyself hast taught me to believe—
With such parade of aggravated scorn,
And undeserved indignities? Him, who
Without a cause imputed or assigned—
Alleged, pretended, or presumed in me
Unworthy as I am—but, as we know,
Because another maid was better worth—
Of nobler parts—more bounteously endowed
With wisdom, beauty, goodness—cast me off,
And left me so—degraded? Would not this
Indeed be meanness?

MONT. Clemence! There's a time
For all things. And our time's but idly spent

In taking thought for morrows so remote.
Sufficient for the day's the evil thereof.
Come. If thy strength permit thee, let's away.

CLEM. I'll gaze no more upon their horrid work.

MONT. Nay, if it please thee, we'll go home at once.

CLEM. Behold! behold! thy daughter on her knees! (*Kneels*)
If power thou hast any, or weight, or influence,
With those grim priests, and mitred ministers,
Of God—no, not of God—'twere blasphemy
To dream that He can sanction what they do—
But if with abbots, bishops, or the like,
Who hunger for the blood of this poor child,
Thou canst in any sort or mode prevail—
If by thy power their murderous appetites,
Can be subdued, or chastened, or controlled—
If by thy smiles be softened or cajoled—
Oh fly—oh fly—to save her from their fangs!
Oh tear her from them—haste—my father! haste!
Oh do not—do not—lose this golden chance—
This great—this glorious opportunity—
Of good—of honourable—of noble work—
Of rescuing innocence from oppression's rage,
Of planting right victorious over wrong—
Yes over barbarous wrong, and butchery.

MONT. Rise. Clemence! Rise. I cannot listen more.

CLEM. But I beseech thee, venture to be just.
Fling form aside—abandon ceremony—
Away with social reverence—social rules—
Follow the teaching of thy noble heart—
Let not its free and generous impulses
Be chained by vulgar saws and sophistries—
Aspire above the selfish pride of power—
The associative tyrannies of rank—
The clogs of custom and conventionalism—

MONT. No more of this.

CLEM. Ah, stay not to dispute.
Fill—fill up for me my imperfect prayers.
My cold—my sluggish speech anticipate.
Think—think—were I—thy Clemence—in her place
Whom now they're murdering yonder—were I thus
On any cause or pretext—wouldst thou not
Spurn from thee law, religion, reverence, faith—
Make light of all their power, and all their prayers—
To snatch from such a doom thy darling child?

MONT. Come. Come. No more of this, I say —no more.

CLEM. Dash me not down to the earth with dreadful words.

"No more"—with words so like a knell of death.
Let not the voice so long I've venerated—
The voice that ever to mine ears has been
Their dearest music, pour into them now
The sentence that my heart's last hope destroys.

MONT. Thou foolish child!

CLEM. Oh fly! dear father! fly.

MONT. No more of this. I cannot thus be moved.

CLEM. Then, if thou can'st be moved, oh! teach me how.

MONT. Thou knowest thy prayers and tears are all in vain.

CLEM. Alas! (*Shouts afar.*)

MONT. Thou hearest.

CLEM. The respite of a day—
An hour—she's young—and death is terrible.
But such a death—

MONT. Enough. I've not the power,
Thou knowest, to save her, Clemence! nor in truth,
Even if I had the power, have I the will.
(*Shouts.*)

CLEM. What mean those shouts? Their tone seems somewhat changed,
They carry to mine ears a ring of joy.

MONT. Whom have we here?

Enter SYLVANUS.

JULIET. A messenger.

MONT. What now?

SYL. My lord! your presence is forthwith required.

They seek and need you yonder.

[*Exit* MONTMORENCI.

CLEM. What portends
This sudden summons? Oh my heart! my heart!
Oh save her, God of Heaven!—she will be saved.

F. SIMON. What's happened, lady! Trust me to enquire. [*Exit.*

CLEM. Friend! by thy face thou shouldst be honest. Speak.

SYL. I'll answer truly, lady! what I'm asked.

CLEM. Why shout the people? Is a pardon given?

SYL. No pardon yet, but still the girl is saved.

CLEM. Has young de Vardois come to save his friend?

SYL. No. But her innocence is undoubted now.

CLEM. Didst thou not tell me, fellow! she was saved?

SYL. Because her innocence is as clear as day.

CLEM. Clearer than 'twas before it could not be.

SYL. But now she's saved, and safer than before.

CLEM. What miracle—man!—has touched their stony hearts?

SYL. Miraculous almost the event has proved.

CLEM. Proceed. Explain the matter more at length.

SYL. The wolf's been found—the wolf—whose severed limb,
Left bleeding in the jaws of Bloui's trap,
And afterwards produced in court, was held
The deadliest proof against the unhappy girl,
Since with her own late-amputated arm
The correspondence seemed irrefragable.
But yonder now this hairy monster lies,
Before her judges dragged, in the open air.
There, by the stake, bleeding and dead, it lies.

CLEM. And now by loss of limb identified?

SYL. A corresponding limb the wolf has lost,
And this new correspondence clears Françoise.

CLEM. Miraculous truly! Friend! But by what chance,
Or what contrivance was the creature slain?

SYL. By woman's wit and woman's arm 'twas done.

CLEM. This makes the matter more miraculous still.

SYL. Lady! the wolf was by a woman slain.

CLEM. Speak. Let me learn, that I may bless, her name.

SYL. Manon Thierry, cousin of the accused.

CLEM. The same who testified against the accused?

SYL. The same. I know her. 'Tis the very same.

But when she found her cousin stood condemned,
It seems, the extremity of remorse and shame
Racked Manon's soul, and spurred her to confess
What part she had taken. 'Twas a cunning plot
Contrived between her and one Jacques Reynard—
A devilish wretch, that never was outdone
In wickedness, and whose malignant soul
Burned hot with hatred to the girl Thilouze,
Because she'd frowned upon his proffered love.
He was her cousin's teacher and confessor—
Her prompter, agent, and auxiliary—
He whispered in her ears with words of hell—
With vile persistence of insidious breath,
Reviving in her heart the waning flames
Of jealous passion, for it seems that once
Was young de Vardois too by Manon loved.
And with them was a foolish fellow joined—
Pierre Bloui, more as dupe and instrument
Than as confederate. These together wrought,
And by their villanous art and diligence

Was woven a web of well-assorted lies,
And slanderous fabrications, by whose means
Their innocent victim to the stake was brought.

CLEM. Was this made public? Was it in form confessed?

SYL. By Manon. She confessed it yesterday.

CLEM. Confessed it?—to the right authorities?

SYL. Confessed it to the fathers, and the peers.

CLEM. And yet no motion made to free the accused?

SYL. Dear lady! 'twas confessed but not believed.

CLEM. To apprehend truth, we must ourselves be true.

SYL. But Manon's recantation was so strange—
So mad—so wild—so violent—so made up
Of noise, gesticulation, and despair—
Her rash, irreverent words no credit won,
And her true penitence but for frenzy fared.

CLEM. How long will heaven—how long will earth endure?

SYL. Nor with confession did she rest content,
But to atone more fully for her crime,
Into the neighbouring woods forthwith she went,
Bearing a rusty musquet on her arm—
Her girlish arm, too light for such a load—
And there encountering with the foe she sought,

Known by its lost foreleg, a huge she-wolf,
Alone she slew it—drew it all alone—
In triumph to the stake.

CLEM. A sight was that
To take away one's breath. But, friend, proceed!
Tell thy strange story just as it occurred.

SYL. I stood among the crowd, beside the pile.
The manifold noise of preparation slept.
A trance of expectation held us mute.
Round—round—we pressed, with sweltering eagerness—
In staring wonder—solemn, breathless awe—
Round where the rude enclosure, wooden-railed,
Repressed and curbed the multitudinous surge,
And kept secure the penal sanctuary
From popular intrusion. There in state,
Sublime on lofty platform, proudly sate
Monks, priests, and prelates—counts and cavaliers—
Forestalling judgment with their awful looks,
Like gods that with judicial vengeance burned,
Who brandished from their brows inexorable,
The bolted fire, and shook with solemn hands,
Above our heads, the mystic urn of woe.
Nor men alone were there. Amid their ranks
Were mingled female forms—the brilliant forms
Of noble women—rich with gems and gold,

In many coloured garments gaily grand,
Who through the manly mass shed grace and
charm,
And mild effulgence, as when lightnings pierce
The sombre rack of clouds, or moonlight peeps
With playful calmness through the cracks of
storms.
Below, the silent, sullen firemen stood—
Death's ministers, and dark as death itself—
Black-stoled—their melancholy faces smeared
With miry blackness, through whose inky screen
Flashed the red fury of their fire-shot eyes,
Like night-fires glaring through the dusky woods,
When all the heavenly lights are blotted out
And crushed by the cold weight of scowling
clouds.
They stood there, waiting for the fatal sign.
And grey gens d'armes kept watch among the
crowd,
In quiet groups, or severally took place,
Or slowly moved along. I glanced at this,
As it were, a moment. Soon my gaze was drawn,
And caught, and on the central figure fixed—
And fascinated by that piteous face—
The face of her to dreadful death designed.
Thereon, as when some sepulchre beloved
By poet-souls, is sculptured in sweet shows
Of carving, or adorned with fair conceits,

Or fondly garnished with religious flowers,
Transfigured into beauty sorrow shone—
There faith looked out victorious over shame.
She did not once lift up her patient eyes,
But held them down, as if she'd bid farewell
To all she loved, and after, thought the world
No longer worth a look. Her nervous lips
Seemed set in resignation. Her wan cheeks,
Wherefrom the red light of the crimson rose
By amorous anguish had been kissed away—
Had borrowed in its stead a paler tinge
From tender twilight. But that face—that face—
Oh! what a heaven of holiness and peace
It breathed—how calm—how beautifully still—
Untroubled as a flower-bed lapped in dew
Upon a windless morning. There she stood—
Begirt with shows of torture—shapes of death—
With types of mortal terror—mortal woe.
All failed to move her—earthly ills had power
No longer to affect her meek indifference,
Or shake the clear and godlike constancy
Of her rapt spirit. Oh! surely in that hour,
The doubt—the dreary mystery of this life—
Had ceased to trouble and perplex her more—
Its clouds—its shadows—its phantasmagories—
Like a dark curtain lifted—she could glance
Beyond the sensual, and this brief eclipse

Of pain and terror past away, would leave
Behind the brightness of the eternal dawn.
Ah, with what grace—what touching majesty—
She bore herself—when on the splintery stake
She leaned for pain and weakness—when the cords,
Which in their coarse embraces held her up,
And with rough freedom wound themselves around
Her slender waist, and in her lily arms
Cut purple furrows, shining white and red,
Through rents and tatters in her sad attire—
I fancied the unimpressible hearts
Of even her savage executioners
Touched with unconscious pity—yes, I thought
Their grimy cheeks were beaded with bright drops
They knew not to be tears. For us that took
No part save watching for the dread event,
Which in the morning when 'twas farther off
We'd almost welcomed with inhuman joy
And mad unnatural triumph, now 'twas near—
So near—and with appalling presence stood
Before us, and its spectral shadow cast
Upon our shuddering senses—oh, that pause
Of irrepressible horror !—Every pulse
Made mute with the over-mastering agony,
Which clad that hour in aspects of all time—

To smite with sudden stop the stream of things,
Or, like the meeting of mad universes,
Blow life out with a shock. We dare not stir—
We spoke not even in whispers—sad and still,
And gloomy as a midnight thick with clouds,
Each other's faces flatly we perused,
And so with solemn wordless sympathy,
Soul answered soul. Methought the wheezy winds
Held in their curdled breaths—the lowering day
Put on a sombre scowl, as if of strength
And glory wasted with indignant tears,
And scornful grief, as might a bridegroom feel,
Who mourns the sudden absence of his bride
Missed on the bridal morning. But anon
The sun grew up—the hour hung over us—
Delay could stretch no further—'twas a moment
Engendering madness. Hark! a shout that soon
Spreads into shapeless uproar, many-voiced—
The tumult thickening from the outer crowd
With gradual surge swells inward. They divide.
The multitude are cleft asunder clean,
And hurrying along the central chasm appears
A maiden shape, in whose disfigured face,
Disordered mien, dishevelled garb and hair,
Scarce can the pretty Manon be discerned.
Straining with half-delirious energy,
And desperate effort, in her girlish grasp,

She drags the body of a wolf—brave girl!—
Not—not a moment she relaxes—no—
Though eager friends press forward to assist,
And thicken round her progress, tightening still
The nervous grapple of her thin small hand,
She thrusts them off with feminine petulance,
And waves her arm impatiently. Behold!
With passionate haste she dashes off her face
Her ropy hair, reft of its raven gleam,
Which shaken out of its accustomed coils,
Falls meshed and ravelling on her neck and breast,
Or flutters in her eyes—her bloodshot eyes
Like red malignant meteors glaring past
From the dark background of distempered skies.
But sad disfigurement!—the ruby bloom
Of her soft cheeks, the round deliciousness
Of her white arms, with many a bloody scratch,
Are seamed and scarred—her skin with sweat and dust
Mapped over by the unflattering touch of toil.
See! through her torn and soiled habiliments,
The bold air freely plays—her languid limbs
Betray their failing motion—there—alas!
She swerves—she droops—a deadly weakness works
Like poison in her veins—the hectic rose
From her wild face begins to fade away—

And crazy totterings muffle up her steps,
Till like a foundering skiff she sways about—
A foundering ship that shakes her lofty top,
And reels and shivers, ere her final plunge
Into the blue depths of the weedy sea—
Before he sucks her down, and writes above
His cold and glassy smiles. Again—again—
Driving along, she gathers up her strength
For one last effort—with a resolute will
She plunges forward—then with eyes of fire,
Hoarse voice, and frantic gesture, flinging up
Her bare arms to the sky, and plumping down
The carcase at her feet, she calls upon
The assembled magnates to reverse their doom,
And set her cousin free. But this achieved,
The struggle's over. Backward she recoils,
And pouring from her lips one passionate cry,
With sudden swoop spreads out upon the ground.
To raise her many a manly arm aspires.
The people crowd about. From lofty seats
Descend the prefects of police. The peers
And prelates follow. I've no more to tell.

CLEM. Thanks! honest friend! But who, in name of Heaven!
Bear hither this sad burden in their arms?

SYL. O sight of pity!

Enter FATHER SIMON, *peasants, and others, bearing* MANON THIERRY.

F. SIMON. Lay her on the turf.
Another victim. But this time, I fear,
The tyrant death will not abate his grasp.

CLEM. Is not this pale and mangled piece of flesh
The very heroine of thy story, friend?

SYL. The same, indeed. Alas! the very same.

CLEM. Oh, noble girl! though much I pity thee,
Yet much more am I bound to honour thee.

MANON. There—lay me close beside her, lay me there.

CLEM. She takes me for another—let her stay.

MANON. I pass away in happiness and joy.
Thou'rt saved. That thought's an angel's lullaby
Hymning my soul to everlasting rest.
Oh! Françoise! in thy bosom let me die.
Yes, let me feel thy kisses on my lips
And wrap me close with thy confining arms,
Like parasites that fold themselves around
And hug the thing they love until it dies.
So when I'm drawn into the abyss of death,
Some sense of thee shall linger on my soul,

Like tones of music streaming into sleep,
And colouring all its dreams. Farewell! Farewell.
Farewell! dear Françoise! thus 'tis sweet to die.
(*Dies.*)

CLEM. Farewell! thy beauty makes death beautiful,
Like midnight blazoned by the setting moon.
Brave spirit! That would not wait for her reward!

F. SIMON. She dies in vain.

CLEM. What ominous words are these,
That like a spectre's at a funeral feast
Would scare us from our sorrow? Speak again.

F. SIMON. My daughter! what I've said, I've said. 'Tis true.

CLEM. Must the dread sentence, after all, prevail?

F. SIMON. The sentence is being executed now.

CLEM. They dare persist against undoubted proof?

F. SIMON. They dare, being resolute upon her death.

CLEM. On legal right do their proceedings stand?

F. SIMON. A sentence passed is final, it appears.

CLEM. Final—thou say'st! When right and argument
Are cut from under, till their void decree
On false or bottomless foundation flares?
Would they not take this maiden's testimony?
Had she no power to touch them with her tears
And dying supplications?

F. SIMON. These, it seems,
In point of form, were not available.
I stood near, weeping, when upon the ground,
Like a green bough, that full of shining leaves,
And rich with blossoms in the summer falls,
Snapped by the unmannerly licentious winds,
And parted from some proud tree's skiey top,
Despoiled, and bruised, and beautiful she lay.
We raised her—would have roused her—but in vain.
We could not fix her fluttering consciousness,
Or win her wandering senses to their posts.
Though still we questioned her, no apt reply
Her lips would lend, but ever and anon
O'erflowed with quaint and pretty rhapsodies,
Clothing with utterance the fantastic thoughts
That came and went across her waning soul,
Like clouds that chase each other in the west,
And flutter o'er the face of dying day.
We patched thus much together—nothing more—
That by her sure aim wounded, the wolf fell

At first for dead, but then recovering, rose
And staggering, strove to fly. Forestalling which,
With arrowy glance, the quick and resolute girl,
Pounced like a swooping eagle on her prey,
And winding round his rough and hairy throat
Her tender arms—those delicate arms that lie
Upon your lap so drooping and disused—
Thus held him throttled till he died. What strife
Those woods then witnessed! what a conquest there
Did woman's courage — woman's strength — achieve!
Alas! she bought her victory with her life.

CLEM. But softened not her judges—

F. SIMON. They resumed
As with refreshed and heightened appetites
Their interrupted meal—oh!—pardon me,
I should have said—their duty. Straight away
I came, forlorn and desolate as a soul
That wanders through the wonder-land of sleep
Into a dream of hell. Oh! would 'twere only
A dream, this moment what we feel and know!

CLEM. How long will Heaven behold these deeds unmoved?

F. SIMON. Patience! To teach is easier than to learn.

CLEM. I pray for her deliverance and expect.

F. SIMON. God make it speedy. 'Tis alas! too sure.

CLEM. She will be saved.

F. SIMON. No miracles, my child!
Are now vouchsafed, nor angel-forms descend
On earth to help the righteous, or to save
The miserable from their predestined doom.
Heaven's far away from us. Above the skies
God reigns, but talks not with the sons of men
As erst he talked in Eden. 'Tis not now
As in those holy and primeval times
When power and wonder glorified the dawn
Of young religion, and the luminous air
Was rich with heavenly visitation—

CLEM. Still—
Believe me, father!—still to the eye of faith
Those wonders may continue. Heaven and earth
Are not divorced. The eternal elements
Of a miraculous existence dwell
Around us, as of yore. Is God a man
That he should change? What is there in the skies,
That was not in the days of Paradise,
Adam, and Eve? The same unchanging stars
Reflect the same unvarying universe.
Nay, even from this accustomed common soil—
This dust whereof we're fashioned, and to which

Dissolved, our recreated atoms go—
This high-road of familiar every day—
Celestial wonders ever spring and grow.
Alas! we want the appreciative eyes—
We fail in spiritual and in holy sense,
To know them when they're near us—
F. SIMON. But, my child!
Not now they're near us. Now they're not vouchsafed,
To this impenitent and material age—
This irreligious people. Nevertheless,
'Tis not for us to murmur, or repine.
'Tis not for us to tempt, or mock at, God,
Or with rash impotence, or peevish tears,
Affront his justice, calling madly down
Unripe fulfilments—
CLEM. Surely God is just—
And surely good. The good his children are.
And He must love them as a father loves—
F. SIMON. And therefore 'tis He spares them from the curse
Of high or prosperous fortune. Their reward
Is not below. He chastens whom He loves.
Where find you this exemption for the good
From wrongs by men inflicted, or from woes
That scourge humanity? Who've been reckoned saints

But those who've suffered? When above our heads
They stalk superior, by the very laws
Of that superiority they're bound
To suffer more than others—o'er the herd
They take precedence, and are separated,
By their superior suffering—they must bear
A more than common burden—they must drain
To the very dregs that cup of bitterness
Which others only sip.—But yonder—see
That thin grey curtain crawling up the sky,
As when death darkens o'er a lovely face.

CLEM. The smoke!—oh fatal sign!

F. SIMON. The curious crowd,
That like a labouring sea were agitated
With ceaseless motion, now condense and shrink
To ominous stillness.

CLEM. Let us pray to God.

F. SIMON. There's nought else left. (*Shouts.*)

CLEM. But hark! They shout again.
Oh, my heart whispers—hope.

F. SIMON. To hope is mad.

CLEM. The heart sees further often than the head. (*Shouts.*)
Again! what means it?

F. SIMON. Some new impulse stirs
The popular mass.

CLEM. Quick. Quick. A messenger!

F. SIMON. That task be mine. I'll bring thee tidings soon.
But I beseech thee, daughter! Be composed.
[*Exit.*

CLEM. And this is justice—this! Oh God of Heaven!
And they who do these things are holy men—
The priests and fathers of the Church of Christ.
But ye, blind skies! are deaf and silent too.
The indifferent sun shines on, and day and night,
Revisit earth with beneficial change,
The seasons dance their annual round of joy,
Earth heaps her lap with bounties as of old,
And Nature smiles the same eternal smile,
As in the soft dawn of her innocent days,
Ere man and crime were born. Oh, spirit accursed,
Oh, hellish pride of persecuting power!
If God permit you to exult awhile,
'Tis but to make your downfall in the end
More prone and fatal. Monarchs! see ye not
The writing on the wall?—Yes now—even now—
As one that listening to the watery roar
Far off, can prophesy the coming flood,
And tell how soon the river's sleepy stream
Shall swell with wanton rage, and overboil,

And waste the fields, and scour the peaceful plains—
So to mine ears with ominous warning draws
More near the tumult of a coming time—
A time of blood and terror—tears and woe—
Of crime and strife, and murder and despair—
When men by tyranny run mad and blind,
Shall like infuriate steeds in reinless rage,
Against the bars of their oppression kick,
And shiver them in splinters— What strange shape—
What woful personage comes halting here,
Whose thin grey hairs, like records of the past,
By sad years left, accumulate woe on woe,
And double the respect that sorrow claims?

Enter LUDOVIQUE THIERRY.

LUD. Where is my child! Show me her bleeding corpse!
That I too late may wash it in my tears,
And heap cold duty on her cold remains.

CLEM. The father's grief is sacred. Stand aside.

LUD. I knew it must be so. I knew it must.
Her death was signified to me in dreams.
But by my cruel anger she was scared,
And my reproaches drove her out to die.
Oh! Manon! Oh! my child!

JULIET. A piteous sight.

CLEM. Thou poor old man! I would I could
do more
Than pity thee!

LUD. 'Tis over. Death's hard hand
Is on her. Ah! he'll not forego his hold
For any conjuring or petitioning
Of mine, I know it. She'd have answered me,
Had but the faintest consciousness been left
In her sweet body. Oh! her sleep is sound.
Sleep on, my darling! Soon I'll follow thee.
Oh, Manon! oh, my child!

CLEM. Molest him not!

LUD. Nay. I beseech you take her not away.
For on this spot I'll bury her in flowers.
With flowers—fresh flowers—I'll build her monu-
ment.
Go. Pluck me—pluck me—flowers.

CLEM. Obey him, friends!
For by these fluttering and ephemeral forms
Of thought, engendered out of the ooze of woe,
That crowd the mourner's brain, and kindly wait
Like angels on the unmitigated doom,
The shelterless and naked sense is screened,
And soothed to sweet oblivion.

LUD. Lay them there.
This turf is fresh and fair. The tender leaves
Are sweet and bright, and flowers are beautiful.

Such praises many a time were showered on her.
But now they suit no more. Far other terms
Must misery find to flatter her in death.
Silent she lies like memory in the heart
Of one bereaved, that scorns to tell the world
The secret of his woe. And pale as clouds,
That by long watching o'er the waning sun
Have worn out of their cheeks the rosy glow.
And cold as passion in a virgin breast.
Take—take—them all away—no more of them!
For out of keeping are their brilliant hues—
They mock the sombre colour of my thoughts.

JULIET. Nearer and nearer still the tumult draws.

CLEM. I dread to meet the foremost messenger.

LUD. They shut my brother up. They held him mad.

As if a nature so serene and mild
Could even at its worst be capable of harm.
But me they would not seize—a mad mistake—
For I was fain to follow and be crazed,
So might I from my misery make away.

CLEM. With face of joy the reverend father comes.

Enter FATHER SIMON, SYLVANUS, *Peasants, &c.*

JULIET. Good news! oh! Father! tell it us in words.

F. SIMON. Good news it is. Françoise Thilouze is saved.

CLEM. I doubt these words so often said in vain.

F. SIMON. But now by royal pardon she's released.

CLEM. Victor de Vardois had a share therein?

F. SIMON. Oh! yes, he came just in the nick of time.

CLEM. Oh! tell us how it happened—tell it all.

F. SIMON. I was not present when de Vardois came.

CLEM. That tale our special messenger shall tell.

SYL. Yes. I was present when de Vardois came.

In breathless silence poised—anticipating
No happy issue—as I stood—burst forth
The thousand-throated inarticulate roar
Of hurrying multitudes, whose joyous shouts
Foretold and preluded his swift approach.
I saw his steed shoot by me, meteor-like,
Directing for the stake his arrowy way.
I watched him cleave the crowds, that right and left,
Were dashed aside before him, like a stream
Of sand before a chariot's whirling wheels.
I marked his sides with bloody patches scored—
His shrunken flanks that panted as he passed,

Begrimed with blood, and smeared in sweat and
dust.
Upon the sounding turf his heavy tramp
Made music, and beat time with his long strides,
And every stride left its own length behind.
I felt two pairs of fiery eyes flash by
As if they burned their way in the heated air.
And as in dreams we pass all obstacles
And count resistance nothing—so it seemed
To them—both steed and rider—with a bound
The barrier past, de Vardois on his feet—
Then straightway, dashing at the pile, he tore
His headlong course, with crash of feet and hands,
And steel-bright circles of his waving sword,
Still making instant and unsightly wreck,
Of everything in his way—thus breaking through
The astonished guards and firemen with the wind
And shock of his approach. Ten paces prone
He hurled the foremost—scared his comrades fled
In terror, or at trembling distance drew.
Till with impetuous onward rush he reached
To where that pale and drooping lily leaned,
Towards him inclining, as towards her he climbed—
Showering a thousand speechless messengers
Of love and wonder from her innocent eyes.
She from the first, what time the joyous shouts,
And rush and tumult of the people, broke
Her trance of resignation and despair,

Felt her deliverer's presence, though unseen,
And kindled to his coming, as a flower
That opens to the daylight, taking life,
And light, and beauty, from the all-bounteous sun.
Then in the extremity of her joy she swooned.
At sight whereof de Vardois maddened more,
Made furious answer to her mute appeal,
With gashes of his sword, whose heavy strokes
Through cords and chains cut sheer, whereby released,
He lifted her in his triumphant arms,
And bore her to the front. We shook the fields,
And echoing woods with our tumultuous joy.

CLEM. How came it that de Vardois' sword availed,
When justice, reason, truth, and mercy failed?

F. SIMON. Not the sole agent was de Vardois' sword.
But thus it came about. I hurried wild
With newly wakened hopes, and by thyself
Commissioned—through the hot and reeking mass
Of men, I bored my desperate way. Within
The barrier, panting as for life and death,
And pasted o'er with black conglomerate dust
And blood and foam, a steed stood riderless.
While Victor, circled with a host of foes—
With big gens d'armes, and burly halberdiers,
Recovered of their fright, who hemmed him in,

With weight of numbers, and authority,
Reigned o'er them, as a rocky island reigns
O'er the mad froth and splutter of the sea.
Upon his weaker arm he stoutly bore
The fainting maid, but held his foes at bay,
With sweeps and threatenings of his sword, but more
With the fierce lightnings of his furious eyes,
Whose glances flashed with concentrated death.
I watched the contest, trembling, and in tears.
A bloody ending seemed inevitable.
While round about us raged, on every side,
The passionate murmur of the multitude,
Fermenting gradually to more distinct
And fervid utterance, like the vague uproar
That far off, simmering on the heated hills,
Threatens the approach, and with indefinite din
Preludes the louder music of the storm,
When black-grey columns of collusive clouds,
The big drops sweating from their moody brows,
With frown of thunder wrinkle up the West,
And droop their leaden bellies overhead
In dropsical exuberance, prompt to pour
Their pent-up moisture to the steely touch
Of the operating air. Praise be to God!
Who willed it otherwise. All my fears proved vain.
For ere the strife such deadly climax reached,
De Vardois, with a start—a sudden start—

As if of instant recollection, snatched
A paper from his bosom, until then,
It seemed, forgotten, and above his head,
With vehement action thrusting it, impaled
Upon the point of his unbloodied sword,
"A Royal pardon" shouted. From his lips
A thousand throats caught up the joyous sound,
And echoed in vociferation wild
"A Royal pardon"—from a thousand eyes
Were mirrored joy and triumph. Then no more
Stood opposition bristling in his way.
But like a flight of birds in summer time,
Scared by the saucy flutter of a rag,
Hung by some careful gardener to secure
His hoarded produce from their plundering bills—
So from the flash of that uplifted scroll
De Vardois' fierce assailants slunk away.
Whereat the impatient people waxing bold,
Curious to learn, and desperate to assist,
With multitudinous crash accumulating,
The barrier burst, and through the splintery breach
Rolled in the human torrent, unrestrained,
In indiscriminate flood. I saw no more.
But came to make thee glad with what I'd seen.

CLEM. And look—they come—joy from their orient eyes,
Like sunbeams dawning.

F. Simon. To be clouded o'er
Again with a new grief. 'Tis ever thus,
We stumble into darkness out of light,
And grief treads swiftly on the heels of joy.

Enter Victor de Vardois. Françoise Thilouze, Pierre Bloui, *and others following.*

Victor. Alas! my love. Look there!
Fran. Is it possible?
Have I been saved for this?
Victor. The petty spite
Of vanquished fortune.
Fran. More than half my joy
Is now wrenched from me.
F. Simon. Oh! the feebleness
Of human faith! My children! murmur not
At God's decree.
Victor. Forbid her not to weep.
Had she not wept, I could have hated her.
Fran. Now first I feel how terrible is death.
Lud. Alas! my child!
Fran. What voice, so phantom-like,
And so familiar, comes to trouble us
And interrupt our sorrow?
Lud. Ye but mock
Who claim the privileges of misery

For such as you, the young and happy—you
Who flutter in the fervid flush of dawn—
You, to whom life's light miseries are no more,
Than far-off tempests, whose diminished breaths,
Upon the shining surface of your joy,
Write feeble ripples, but can never reach
The silent depths below. Ye're young. Ye're young.
Shipwrecked, ye fling your treasures overboard.
Hope buoys you on to hospitable shores
Where soon ye pick up others. 'Tis, in age
That utter desolation bows us down.
Then—then—we find no later landing place,
Nor home, nor household deities—any more.

FRAN. Dear uncle! Let me be thy daughter now.

LUD. 'Twixt thee and me a fatal shadow lowers.

FRAN. She sacrificed her life, alas! for me.

LUD. She sacrificed her life for thee in vain.

VICTOR. A noble deed is never done in vain.
Like bread upon the waters it returns
And future tides shall carry it to use.
Come take her hence. To see her sepulchred,
Be mine, old man! the melancholy charge!
And by my knightly honour, she shall want
No fitting rites—no funeral obsequies.
Brave but unfortunate maiden! on her tomb

The figure of a wolf in marble carved,
Shall stand a record to succeeding times,
How by a generous and heroic death
She wrought her expiation! Bear her hence!
But with a soft and reverent gentleness
Befitting how she died.

PIERRE. That task be mine.
It is my right, mine only. Once indeed
I thought to lead her to far other rites.
But she was wilful—wilful to the last,
And died 'twould seem to cheat me of a bride.
Oh! woful end of all my fondest hopes!
One truth alone by Reynard's lying lips,
One truth at least! I recollect was told.
For truly Pierre is disenchanted now.
The wonder and the witchery of his life
Are past away for ever. Give me room
Good fellows! I've no further business here.

[*Exit bearing the body, crowd following. Shouts outside. Enter peasants, male and female, dragging* REYNARD *with a rope round his neck.*

1ST PEA. Drag him along. Vile rascal!
2ND PEA. There's a tree
Will serve our purpose.
1ST PEA. Reynard! thou shalt dance
A measure in the air.

3RD PEA. Come up with him.
A base informer!
VICTOR. Fellows! What's all this?
FRAN. Oh! save him, Victor! save their simple souls
From the commission of so dire a crime.
VICTOR. Forbear! I say, forbear!
1ST PEA. Who speaks? how now?
VICTOR. This must not be, good friends!
2ND PEA. Trouble us not.
3RD PEA. We brook no interruption.
4TH PEA. Stand aside.
5TH PEA. There swing him—swing him up.
VICTOR. The man who lays
A finger on him, let him know 'tis done
On peril of his life.
1ST PEA. This looks not well
In thee, de Vardois!
3RD PEA. Wherefore stand between
The wretch and what he merits?
SEVERAL. 'Tis not well.
1ST PEA. Why 'tis mere justice.
VICTOR. Leave him to the laws.
1ST PEA. For such as he the laws were made in vain.
'Tis by the laws he works. His mischiefs thrive
Out of their weakness and inefficacy,

If we release him now he'll quite escape,
Although in truth a murderer.
VICTOR. Leave him then
To his avenging conscience and to God.
JACQ. Think you I sorrow then for what I did?
For this alone I sorrow—your success—
My futile and defeated purposes.
Such is the quality of my remorse.
In childhood, once perhaps, like other fools
I had a conscience.
2ND PEA. Up with him at once,
Inhuman monster!
JACQUES. 'Tis not possible
To make you understand me, ye dull brutes!
I cannot clothe in words, or well express,
The loathing and contempt I feel for you—
Ye base—ignoble rabble—scum of earth!
Garbage and dregs and refuse of mankind!
Beasts!—beasts! ye're nothing better—nothing higher—
Like beasts ye prowl about in coward packs—
Like beasts delight in blood.—
1ST PEA. Ye hear him, friends!
Shall such a wretch be suffered?
VICTOR. Have a care. (*To* JACQUES.)
Be silent on your life. Be silent, else
Shall this volcano overboil its bounds,
And merge us both in ruin.

JACQUES. Let it come.
The fate I share with thee, however hard,
I welcome it with joy.
FRAN. Thy life he saved.
Is this thy gratitude ?
JACQUES. The life he saved
Let him surrender. Ah ! too well thou knowest
Why I no longer care to live.
1ST PEA. Rush in
And seize de Vardois.
VICTOR. Am I then asleep,
That thus ye talk of seizing ? Come my friends !
Ye know de Vardois better. Here I stand
And vouch, as surety for this wretch's life—
The man who lays a finger on him dies.
FRAN. In happy time, here come the halberdiers.

Enter Police, gens d'armes.

VICTOR, I charge you, see him safe. They seek his life.
No doubt 'tis due to justice and the laws.
But not to their blind rage. So make him safe.
[*Exeunt Police, gens d'armes with* JACQ. REYNARD.
VICTOR. How to accost thee Clemence ! in what words
Solicit thy forgiveness, and confess
My deep contrition and unworthiness—
I could not hope to satisfy myself,

Or make discovery, choked and paralyzed
With sense of the ineradicable past,
And burdened with unexpiated wrongs—
But that I know thee made of nobleness,
Instinct with heavenly pity, capable
From spheres sublime of high and holy scorn,
Of looking down compassionately on sins,
Wherewith thy saintly spirit was never soiled—
Thy pure conception never caught the stain of.
Not then in self-sufficient recklessness—
Not puffed with arrogance or presuming pride,
Not in light scoffing or irreverent mood—
But with such self-abasement as befits
When earth looks up to heaven, I kneel and pray,
Thou wilt with no severe conditions clog
The pardon I solicit and require. (*Kneels.*)

CLEM. I will not have it—Victor !—Victor !—
Rise.
Shall sinners thus to sinners bend the knee ?
Indeed, I've nought to pardon—I insist
Thou'st never done me wrong. But let the past
Be past—the dead bury their dead. There's one
Beside thee leaning on thy loving arm
Writes out thy pardon for thee with her eyes.
Go. Love her. Make her happy. There, that's
all
The price I set on my forgiveness—
And this the sole condition I desire.

VICTOR. Is she not heaven itself? What said I, love!

FRAN. Thy love for me was earth preferred to heaven.

VICTOR. Yet are there many mansions even in heaven.

FRAN. I would not now resign thee even to heaven.

VICTOR. Oh Clemence! where thy footsteps light is heaven.

CLEM. Heaven is where God makes Himself manifest.

For what has happened God alone be praised!

VICTOR. May He encircle thee with favour—shower

On thy sweet head all earthly happiness!

CLEM. No doubt 'tis He directs my present choice.

This moment Clemence from the world retires
To pass her future life in holy shades,
With holy men and women, and therein
Safe to enjoy sublimer happiness
Than ever will be yours, ye happy pair!
Remember me a little both of you.
Remember me a little in your prayers—
Remember me a little in your loves—
Remember me as much as either can.
You, be assured, I never shall forget.

My constant prayers shall follow you unseen,
And watch like ministering angels over you.
Farewell! On me at least the curtain falls.

[*Exit.*

The rest remain in groups and gradually follow. Procession passes over the stage. PIERRE BLOUI *at head of bearers, with body of* MANON. VICTOR, FRANÇOISE, *and others. Chorus of peasant girls.*

Chorus of Peasants.

Farewell! Thou hast done with the world, and we bear thee adorned and drest
For the road, in thy travelling garments, and clad for the realms of rest.
Farewell! 'Tis a sudden parting, and fresh from the font to the sod,
We bear thee in tender duty, and give thee to rest with God.
With sanctions solemn and holy—with mingled gladness and grief—
Befitting thy death so noble—befitting thy life so brief.
We mourn thee with smiling faces, and mourning we still rejoice—
And thy requiem chant with choking of breath, and with faltering voice.

We mourn for thine early promise bereft of its
blooming years—
Rejoice that though taken from us, so brilliant
thy dawn appears.
For few does so fair a story, break out through
the parting breath—
Few blaze with immortal glory just over the
verge of death.
Like a blossom that's early blighted, in season of
scented bloom,
By frosts of untimely winter, we bear thee away
to the tomb.
True hearts at thy tale shall kindle—young
breasts with thy name shall glow—
And the fame thou hast earned this morning with
the growth of the years shall grow.
And the music and songs of ages, from the lips
of the brave and just,
Shall out of the mazy future, make sacred thy
mouldering dust.
Yet never let tongue bewail thee, nor voices
lamenting say—
"Too early her fate pursued her—too soon was
she called away."
'Twere vain to have lingered after thy work was
so bravely done—
'Twas well to go out in glory, as a comet that
sets in the sun.

When the wrong thou had'st done was atoned
for and merged in that matchless strife—
'Twas well from thy spirit thus chastened to dash
the cold embers of life—
To fling off the coil and the chain from thy spirit
thus chastened and purged,
And out of that fiery ordeal in bridal whiteness
emerged.
Oh God! when my time has come may thy mercy
vouchsafe me this—
By a fate like hers to summon my soul to the
realms of bliss!
Ere the burden and dust and heat of the blinding
and dreary day
Shall clog and encumber my parting soul on its
heavenward way—
While the skies are fair and cloudless, and the
dawn is undimmed and bright—
Ere the shadows of evening thicken and close in
abiding night.
Farewell! then never with fury of tears, or with
selfish sighs,
We'll fondly delay thy journey, or hold thee
back from the skies.
Farewell! shall this pathway often by reverent
steps be trod—
And we give thy name to its deathless fame—and
thy spirit to rest with God.

SONNETS, ETC.

ELEGY L. F.

And the weary strife is over and won from a weeping throng,
Has that dear wan face deserted the home that she loved so long?
The terrible shapes of slumber with slumber itself pass o'er,
But ah! from this dream of anguish our hearts shall awake no more.

How thought by the stroke confounded swirls round like an eddying stream!
And the Past is a torturing memory—the Future a ghastly dream.
And a sound as of phantoms wailing, whose burden by night and day
Is—gone—gone for ever—for ever gone away.

And her seat at the board left vacant so silent and sad appears—
And her books and her plants untended we water with idle tears.
Foolish but fond memorials! Could they but only know
How much with their mute communion they rankle the wounds of woe!

Oh! for some ray from heaven to illumine our
dark despair,
When the dear familiar voices shall mingle in
household prayer—
And the cruel thought shall smite us like a blast
of the desert's breath,
One voice of that long-linked chorus for ever lies
hushed in death.

Cold are all words of counsel—high reason but
seems to rave—
Could reason herself be tearless beside the
beloved one's grave?
Ye friends! that so wisely warn us our grief is
too fond and wild—
Ah! ye have not lost a sister—ye do not mourn
a child!

Who doubts that immortal beauty shall crown
her beyond the sun?
But 'twas cruel in her to leave us though heaven
was the bribe she won.
For us—for us—that have lost her, where in
those empty skies—
Where are her smiles to greet us—where are her
answering eyes?

But the pitiless sentence spoken—our clamours
have no control
To call from its long—long—journey the light of
her vanished soul.
And the weakness of human wailing dies out in
the vaults above—
Yes vain—vain—is our sorrow—but still more
vain was our love.

Where are the hues of morning—the dreams that
around her grew?
They've mocked us like gifts of fairies that trial
has proved untrue.
Gone like the gleams of Eden, extinguished in
angels' tears—
Never again to kindle under our darkening
spheres.

Why—why—did we love her—why did our fond
hearts glow
With hopes, like abortive blossoms, to wither
away in woe?
Was it for this we cherished, to lose her in realms
afar—
Her path with the wandering meteor—her rest
with the lonely star?

So dismal the train of spectres that cumber the
parting breath—
So shadows on shadows crowding deepen the
gloom of death!
Till grief into frenzy failing lifts upwards its
aimless cry,
Like an infant left deserted under the lonely sky.

But sunshine was born of darkness, and often in
gloomiest night
Shall the far horizon kindle with gleams of return-
ing light.
And faith has its froward fancies, and sorrow in
shipwreck clings
To fragments of wrenched affection, and forms
of familiar things.

As the midnight wanderer gazes where his distant
hearthfire burns
So to heaven, of all hope forsaken, the heart of
affliction turns.
With the pangs of hell upon us—in the darkest
of dark despair—
The finger of God shall steer us—the wind of
His breath be fair.

Bright be the stars above her—solemn the steps
that tread—
Tender and gentle memories dwelling around the
dead!
And grief as it grows shall soften, the sadness of
tears subside,
As the fury of mountain torrents expands to the
peaceful tide.

And love! let thy light pursue her to the world
which death has given—
A world of night and silence, of mystery and of
heaven.
There 'mid the thick star-clusters, where system
on system rolls,
She has met with a smiling welcome from a sister-
band of souls.

And there into glorious being in beauty and light
she warms,
Girded with starry natures, circled with shining
forms.
And the fulness of angel-presence is the air she
inhales above,
Where sight is absorbed in beauty, and feeling
resolved in love.

But nor moon nor stars they wot of—they reck
not of skies or suns—
Like a self-illumining river their radiant existence
runs.
And the spirit-life that fills them is to them for
days and times—
For the courses of years and ages—for changes
of scenes and climes.

And when earth as a smoke shall vanish—the
heavens as a skin be shed—
And the all-enfolding ages drop like a blossom,
dead—
'Mid glory and light eternal they still shall revolve
and move,
Like rays from the living centre and infinite heart
of love.

Sprinkle her grave with blossoms—sweeten the
air with song,
And call on her happy spirit with tones that she
loved so long—
And in mystic gleams and breezes vouchsafed
from that awful shore—
Believe that her love is wafted—her presence in-
haled once more.

And often on Sabbath mornings when the heaven-
ward hymn shall swell,
Her spirit may hovering hear us beside where her
ashes dwell,
And mingled with virgin voices, and the thunder
their organ rolls,
Pour forth a mysterious answer heard in our
inmost souls.

SERENADE.

From thy warm niche where like a saint in glory,
'Mid snow-white cerements you serenely sleep,
Come down through midnight mist and moonlight
hoary,
Where I with steps forlorn Love's vigil keep—
Like some rapt Magian priest with weary eyes,
Who watches till the star he worships shall arise.

Oh come! Oh come! with footsteps light and
airy
That make sweet music with the murmuring
flowers—
With soft, swift flutterings, like some Paphian
fairy,
Whom Love's deep spells have summoned from
her bowers—

With witching ways to set the night on fire,
And thrill the enamoured spheres with throbs of sad desire.

Come — atmosphered in Love and breathing Beauty,
With odours of warm motion round thee shed,
Fresh soul infusing through my barren duty,
And hallowing where you touch with dainty tread—
Into my circling arms with kisses grow,
As into the mad sea the passionate rivers flow.

Here let our mutual lives so fondly mingle,
Till your whole being shall seem a part of mine—
Till nerve to nerve — till pulse to pulse—shall tingle,
And from our eyes no separate senses shine—
Till everything around us drown and die
And nothing but ourselves we feel beneath the sky—

Till the pale stars shall envy our embraces,
And paler planets flame with jealous fire—
Till the yellow moonlight glimmering in our faces
Confess the fond confusion of desire—

Till written on the skies our raptures glow
In characters of light, reflected from below.

Come—thy long promises at last fulfilling,
And into warmer life my life unfold,
That I no more may doubt thee kind and willing,
To be that angel thy bright face foretold,
When its first glance with prophecies divine,
And message fresh from heaven, flashed on this life of mine.

Come—answering my familiar invocation,
And through the summer skies with radiant stream
Pour effluence bright, and soft illumination,
As when some fire-fraught meteor's golden gleam
Descending, scatters round in arrowy flight,
Gay motes, and feathery sparks, and coruscating light.

And anxious angels from heaven's windows leaning,
Shall track thee from afar with starry eyes,
Following thy footsteps with immortal meaning,
And quickening smiles, and splendours of the skies,
And raining round thy head propitious prayers,
And holy guardianship, and paradisal airs.

Smile—and the faint rays on the front of morning
Which, as they spread, the affrighted stars displace,
May mock the crescent hues that cheek adorning,
When overflowing from thy consummate face,
Shall penetrate through midnight's black eclipse
The tinted tenderness of thy transfiguring lips.

Oh! speak, and music tunefully unsheathing
Her viewless wings upon thy voice shall die,
And night winds amorous of thy fragrant breathing,
Beside thy parted lips shall fondly sigh,
And seeming to disperse, shall linger round,
Feed on the balmy air, and echo the sweet sound.

Oh! happy winds! that on her forehead playing
With the rich hair your wanton fingers twine—
Or 'mid her bosom's sacred depths delaying—
Or quivering on her cheek with kisses fine—
Happier—if subject to so sweet a spell,
Thus waiting on her ways ye might for ever dwell!

But if my passion have no power to woo thee,
And my waste worship fail to win thee near,
I'll breathe a thousand kisses up unto thee,
That shall infect that fruitless atmosphere

With soft compunctions, and against thy will,
Contagious tenderness through thy proud soul
instil.

But come or come not—be thou kind or cruel—
My lips shall breathe nor murmur nor regret.
Since always thy dear image, like a jewel,
Shall in the centre of my life be set,
And even as the unseen sun the world obeys,
Shall rule my universe with its unrisen rays.

BARRATTI IN SYDNEY.

I sat emparadised in a dream of song
From that fair silver-throated siren caught
Who lately to Australian ears has taught
Strains which of right to the older lands belong—
Who still, night after night, to some rapt throng
Held mute as death by cunning utterance,
pours
Her bird-notes, blazoned from Italian shores—
I sat, as if I'd passed away among
The gods of music, whose habitual tongue

Was music ever—lifted to the spheres
Where the soul's gate is through the passionate ears,
And on Æolian waves life floats along—
Nor wist how long I dwelt in trance profound
And arching atmosphere of empyrean sound.

ON LANDING IN ENGLAND.

White cliffs of Albion! Have we met at last?
But after all these miles of land and sea
In what hard fashion dost thou welcome me,
Old mother! careless of my perils past?
With heavy lowering nights—with days o'ercast—
With lurid livery of mistempered skies,
Wherein we strain our melancholy eyes
As searching for a sun that's gone astray—
Sad trees that, sorrowing for his absent ray,
Or still in mourning for the buried years,
Stand, black as beadles on a funeral day,
Or widows, who in church for comfort pray—
And, dripping — dripping — with continual tears,
As if they'd weep their wintry lives away.

SIX SONNETS ON THE CRIMEAN WAR.

PUBLISHED IN THE "SYDNEY EMPIRE," ABOUT THE TIME OF THE PEACE.

I.

Above their graves shall future travellers pause,
And wondering ages on their story dwell—
To think, how little from a barren cause
True worth of ridicule or dishonour draws,
Since warring round that sea-girt citadel,
To glut the rabid avarice and the pride
Of priests and despots, they sublimely died
And made the ground immortal where they fell.
Brave souls! No dream of gains or losses, tied
To a perplexing purpose, mystified
Their clear endeavour. But they still could bleed
And fling away their lives—their country's need
Their only argument. So their dust distils
From foreign soils. The world their glory fills.

II.

Ye kites and eagles of Crimean plains!
Long gorged and pampered with heroic blood!
Ye terrible epicures! Whose awful food
Was British flesh, or sucked from British veins!
True types ye seem of kingdoms and of thrones,
For whom the red inheritance remains,
Of all their bleeding nations have endured.
The selfish ends of sovereignty secured—
Like you, the despots count their ghastly gains.
Supreme in bloated state above the groans
Of Europe, resting from her seven-years' toil
They sit and share the profit and the spoil.
Like you, from gory fields they seem to spread
Their cruel feasts, and fatten on the dead.

III.

Ah me! The world's a vault that history paves
With buried nations. Egypt's awful bones
Spread blanched in deserts. Hark! the dulcet tones
Of Asian winds come whispering over graves.
Greece only melts us as with odorous breath
Of churchyard flowers that make a friend of death.

Fair Italy in hollow accents raves,
Mingling reproach with anguish as a ghost
Complains amid the scenes she loved the most.
And Poland like a prisoned spirit sighs.
Far off how many a dusky nation lies
Deep hid in woods, or in oblivion lost!
Oh Heaven! The end! Shall this be ever so?
And whither these have gone must England go?

IV.

Sebastopol! That on the Sable Sea
Sitt'st with the blood of many nations bathed
Now that war's waning tempest leaves thee free,
How proudly, frowning from thy craggy steep,
With haggard looks thou dost survey the deep,
Sublime though shattered — terrible though scathed!
Oh! more enduring monument than brass
Or marble shape, stern city! thou shalt pass
From memory never—privileged to bear
The horrid brand and character of war
Imprinted on thy forehead, as a scar
Adorns a warrior. Oh! for ever wear
Thy glory so. When noble foes are crowned
By our own hands, we make ourselves renowned.

V.

Why shout ye thus, unthinking multitude?
Why thus with sulphurous stars, and fiery glare,
Disturb the quiet night? Why vex the air
With idle pæans? Look you. Peace is good,
And therefore to rejoice in sober mood,
We owe to God, who blesseth us thereby.
But why—I ask you, giddy people!—why
Need freedom's sons with heartless mirth insult
Their brothers in affliction—why exult,
When tyrants only chuckle? Still the sky
Looks down on nations trampled in the dust.
Still Poland yields her myriads to the lust
Of foreign wars. Still Italy depressed
By hopeless anguish tears her bleeding breast.

VI.

'Twixt East and West a giant shape she grew
To both akin, and making both afraid—
Casting a lurid shadow on the new
And ancient world, her greedy eyes betrayed
The tiger's heart, and ominously surveyed
The peoples destined for her future prey.
From polar steppes, and ice-encumbered seas,
To where the warm and blue Symplegades

Perplex the splendour of a Grecian day,
She stretched her long grasp, conquering by
degrees,
And when at length the banded nations rose
In armed resistance, their combined array
With equal arms she shrank not to oppose,
But bravely stood where still she stands at bay.

I think me none the worse that I submit
To be her subject, minister, and slave—
That whatsoever she may deign to crave,
To the world's end I'd go to fetch her it.
Beneath her empire I'm content to sit
For ever, to the extreme of mortal days—
And pour out pæans of perpetual praise
That for her service I'm not found unfit—
Though governed, as it were, with rein and bit—
Or treated as a fool, that's only wise
By full reflection of her favouring eyes.
And if I chance to make a happy hit
In word or action, 'tis the light they shed
Draws music from the stone—pours life into tho
dead.

Rich wine of Capri! Thou—how many a time—
Hast the stern soul of grim Tiberius soothed!
Mellowing the monster, till, with bristles smoothed,
And saturated by thy juice sublime,
Saved was the ungainly despot from a crime,
And haply set some innocent victim free
From his imperial claws. Who, tasting thee,
But feels the infusion of that genial clime,
And softens to a mood more apt to chime
In harmony with nature and mankind?
Oh! grand old days when thou wert in thy prime,
Ere modern purists could thy right divest
Of solace for the sad, and succour for the oppressed!

Can freedom save a nation from decay?
Shall states by democratic suffrage miss
The doom of that inevitable abyss
Where our progenitors all have passed away?
Ah! might not Italy at this moment say—
"Where are my great names which o'erawed the world—
My flags in many a famous fight unfurled—
Rome—Venice—Genoa—Florence—where are they?

For orators who prate, and priests who pray—
Where are the men of might—the men of mind—
Who wrote with pens or swords upon mankind
Immortal History?—Give me back the day
When proud patricians sat in civic chairs,
And noble blood and birth had sway in state affairs."

PUBLISHED IN THE "SYDNEY ATHENÆUM."

To love, being all unable to express
How much, nor ever make our meaning clear—
To mask affection with perpetual fear,
And stifle feeling in its own excess—
Made dumb by inarticulate tenderness—
Who this has never felt, has never loved,
Nor owned what true love is, nor ever proved
Its deep extremity of divine distress.

Happy, whose hearts love burdens but to bless
With that deep mystery — with a sacred store,
Of thoughts unutterable—like priceless ore
Safe-shrined from miners' search—in measureless
Abysses of the soul—beyond all reach
Of hard inquisitiveness, and cold imperfect speech!

In Ellen's bright imperious eyes
I saw the gates of Paradise,
But in the scornful glance they poured,
The angel of the flaming sword.

Me!—more than Adam's race unblest
Who once their happy place possessed!
This fact fills up the eternal void—
They ate their apple and enjoyed.

Happy, for whom through present pains,
Their past indelible remains.
Nor darkest night, nor deepest dole,
Can quench that twilight of the soul.

Thus memory's necromancy fine
Through sorrow sheds a sense divine—
Thus forms of unforgotten years
Rise up, transfigured in our tears.

The dead—the absent—thus embrace—
Lip clings to lip—face presses face.
And love rekindles with a kiss
The long-extinguished fires of bliss.

But I for pleasures vainly pine
Which never were, nor will be, mine—
Progenitor as of births unborn—
Of memory, and of hope, forlorn.

To worlds of life will never grow
This chaos of my formless woe—
My past a blank—my future bare
With dread prevision of despair.

Ah! might I too, like Adam, earn,
The sorrow I by suffering learn!
And bear what punishment he bore,
To taste the penal bliss before.

SONNET TO W. B. D. UPON HIS WEDDING-DAY,

WRITTEN IN A BOOK AND AFTERWARDS PUBLISHED, WITH ONE WRITTEN BY DR. BADHAM UPON THE SAME OCCASION, IN THE "SYDNEY MORNING HERALD."

Following the track—alas! how far behind—
And inspiration of our classic friend,
I venture with this votive gift to blend
A votive verse, whose humble flowers entwined
With richer wreaths, and flowers of brighter kind,
Fall round, to greet thee, on thy bridal day.
And may the unfashioned thoughts these lines convey—
Far less to be apprehended than divined—
In thy quick sympathetic spirit find
Such aid, as shall, like rain from genial skies,
Enrich with hues of happy prophecies
The pale prefigurations of the mind,
And in poetic form and vision show
What love for thee and thine, unspoken, sleeps below.

ITALY.

Oh! land of ruins and of memories! Gone—
Gone are thy days of glory!—Gone the crowd
Of conquering squadrons in thy streets—the loud
Acclaim of tongues for deeds no longer done.
A Queen upon a desecrated throne
Thou sitt'st. Men haunt to wonder or deride
Thy ghostly shores. The same sea flows beside
Which once thy navies ruled—the same bright sun
Looks down indifferent from his azure zone.
But thou fair land! art shrunk into a song.
To Fame—the World—the indefinite Past belong
Thy noblest names—no longer now thine own—
Bards—warriors—sages—fading, till they seem
Forms of fantastic thought and creatures of a dream.

VENICE.

Immortal Venice! Wedded to the sea—
Wedded! Alas!—Though thine indifferent spouse
Fools thee with utterance of fantastic vows
Such as men waste in mock idolatry
On symbols from which Time hath set them free—
Though still some fretful serenade he pours
On thy lone havens and deserted shores,
As in the glorious olden days, when he
Was slave, and subject, and all else, to thee—
Yet now for other mistresses or brides,
He pours rich treasures from his plastic tides,
Fickle as any man could hope to be.
And thou forlorn and desolate art left
Proud city! of all except thine ancient fame bereft.

THE POOR OF LONDON.

Lift up, ye poor! your everlasting prayer!
We have you with us always, as foretold
By the great Teacher, in the times of old—
We have you with us always—everywhere.
Your spectral faces haunt us through the glare
Of this great city—from its storied stones
In chorus rise your immemorial groans—
Your rags and misery taint the turbid air—
Lift up your million voices, and prepare
The prosperous thousands for that ominous day,
When your grim choirs, grown ghastlier by delay,
And sick with hope deferred, from every lair
Issuing, shall seize the citadels of power,
And brandish vested rights to pillage and devour.

CONSOLATION.

There are good people in the world despite
The embittering competitions, and the strife,
Which make us rivals in the race of life—
Which breed confusion betwixt wrong and right,
And turn the "milk of human kindness" sour.
Thank God for this, in darkness or in light,
Though troubles multiply—though tempests lower—
Though human nature is crushed out of sight,
And deaths are heaped for eagles to devour—
Thank God for this, that in the darkest hour,
We still have friends upon our side to fight,
Who shine like stars, made welcomer by night,
And come by chance, as if from God they came—
Whom honest hearts can love, without regret or shame.

LOVE HAS EYES.

Dear friend! Believe me, Love's not always blind,
But as an idiot's spiritual night,
By sudden inspiration set alight,
May teach mysterious wisdom to mankind,
So amorous insight flashes on the mind,
And shows your naked soul—even as you are
With all your womanly faults, yet lovelier far
Than any perfect creature I can find
In this imperfect world by God designed—
Faults, that like spots upon the peerless sun,
Into unexpected light and beauty run—
Gazing whereon methinks I leave behind
Earth's vapid shows, and my delighted eyes
Throb as with beams intense, and splendour of the skies.

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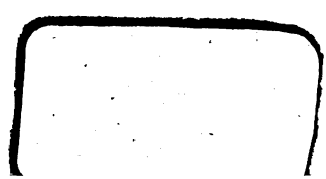
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